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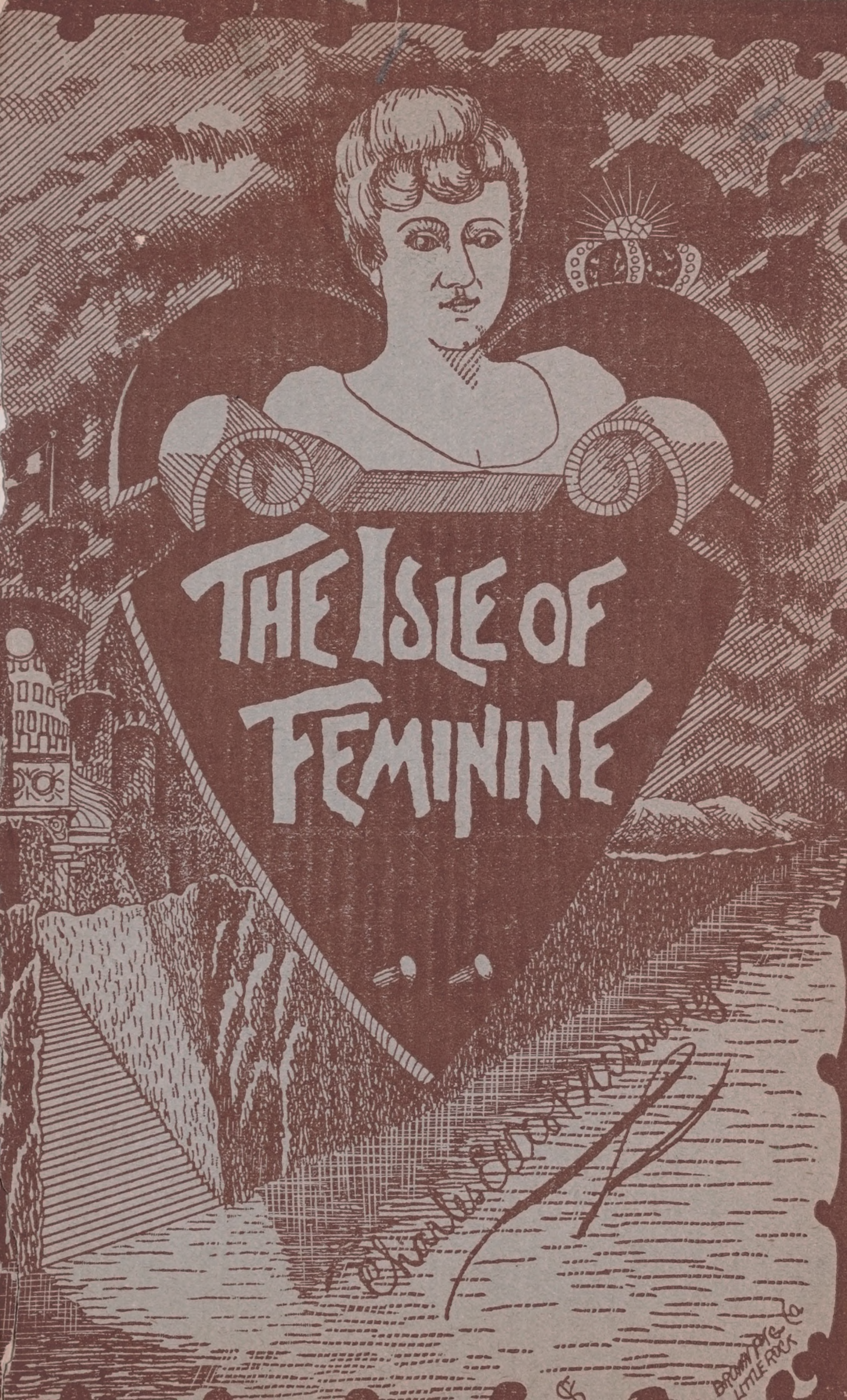
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THE ISLE OF FEMININE

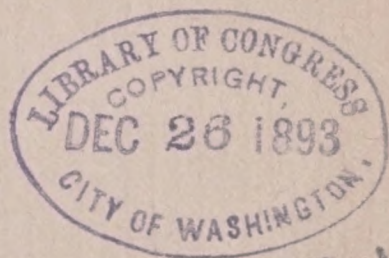
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THE ISLE OF FEMININE

BY

CHARLES ELLIOT NISWONGER



Press of
Brown Printing Company
Little Rock

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DEDICATED
TO THE FAIR SEX,
FOR WHOSE FANCY WAS CREATED,
AND FOR WHOSE SAKE
I HAVE DESTROYED,
MY "ISLE OF FEMININE."

PREFACE.

STRANGE phenomena and occurrences hard to believe are daily recorded and made part of our national history in the wane of this nineteenth century. These, according as they fall to our own or some distant State, we accept in wonder, or reject as the product of some fertile imagination.

Two years ago, while I was making a special study of catacomb inscriptions under the Imperial City, I received a cablegram from home conveying the sad intelligence that my father was quite ill, and that, being arrived at the good old age of four-score years and ten, there was but slight hopes of his recovery. I hurried home on the first vessel to find that my good parent had been buried many days, and as I was his only heir and there was a goodly estate, I deemed it inexpedient to return to my tiresome studies at Rome, and accordingly I retired

to my country place to rest and make plans for the future.

I had only been home about two weeks when the dreary fall rains set in and penned me up in the library with a cheerful grate and my pipe as my only companions. The first day of imprisonment I passed very well; now smoking and dreaming, and again admiring the virtues of George Eliot's poor, but the next, ah! that second day I found invidious and almost unbearable. To pass the time more quickly I finally went to my father's escritoire and began to look over his papers. Hidden deeply in one of the pigeon holes, side by side, were a letter written by some country lass to my sire while he was in college and a bill for groceries receipted by one A. Vogel, September 11, 1812. In one drawer I found a neatly bound book marked on the binding, "Diary of Andrew Lowe, from January 1, 1801, to ——." This little treasure I laid aside and hurried on. In the bottom drawer I discovered a bundle of

manuscript which at once excited my curiosity. On opening it I found a note in my father's handwriting which ran :

“ This paper is written in my old age that my dear son and heir may be possessed of the history of certain months in my life which I have always permitted to remain a matter of conjecture among my neighbors and friends.”

I read and re-read the manuscript ; my father's autograph alone forbade my doubting its truthfulness. After much thought I have concluded to make public the contents of this strange paper, chiefly for the benefit of those good friends who have been kind to me from childhood and the long-tried neighbors whom my father loved.

THE AUTHOR.

THE ISLE OF FEMININE.

CHAPTER I.

By the grace of God I enjoy good health in this the eighty-seventh year of my life, but I know it will not be long until I will rest by my dear wife on the hillside.

It seems no longer than yesterday that my friend George Latting came into my little room at home and said in his cheerful way, "What say you to a cruise, old fellow?"

"Why not propose the purchase of Australia?" I replied. "Cruise, indeed. You should know the word 'cruise' is not included in the poor man's vocabulary."

"Pshaw," replied George, "I thought you'd enjoy it."

"Not I. You should be hanged for exciting desires in a poor man that he isn't able to gratify. Cruise, indeed!"

"Andy, you are an idiot," said George. (He never was careful of his speech.) We can take that old shell of mine and stock her for two weeks, and—I'll omit the word 'cruise' since you don't know it's meaning—row along the coast, and when the breeze is suitable hoist the bit of canvas that belongs to her. It'll not cost much, and we can have a fine time."

"Aha."

"I thought you'd wake up. We both need a little fresh air before striking out in earnest, and you want to have your wind in pretty good shape for its lick about in the struggle, with a possibility of the world's striking harder blows than you'll be able to repay in kind."

"Never mind the world," I replied; "when do we start?"

"At any time you're ready."

"How many have you invited?"

"Two."

"Who are they?"

"You and I."

"What are you going to stock the boat with?"

"O, the staff of life, I suppose."

"Well, be sure it's good and hard. Better get biscuit; I don't take to light bread on the water."

"Who said anything about bread? I said the staff of life."

"'Bread is the staff of life,' saith the wise man."

"Bah! I knew a man who lived six months on spirits after he had gotten past the bread line. And he died happy, too. Said his soul was preserved, and so on."

In answer to this pleasantry I hurled the book I had been reading at my friend's head, but somehow I aimed badly, and it missed him and took fragments of a pane of glass with it into the street. "There," I cried, "fifty cents for the glass, and five dollars for the injury done my Dante. Wretch, why will you come into my room and excite my anger? Pay me for the damage you've done."

“Why will you have passions to awake?” he replied. “Man is but a beast after all. Poke an iron rod at the turtle and he’ll break his jaw to no purpose but to have his head pulled over the block for slaughter. Tickle the hind legs of a mule, and he’ll kick high into the air and hurt nothing but the tendons of his legs. So man flies into a fury and destroys his own belongings. I think when the Creator made the things inanimate, He found them so grandly serene they embarrassed Him, so He made a lot of creatures to humiliate and destroy them. But come, do we start tomorrow?”

“Yes,” I replied, “I’ll be at the wharf at daybreak.”

I should like to go on and tell you all about the sad voyage we took, and how strangely it ended, but I find one’s memory is not clear at eighty-seven, and I fear I might tell the story very badly. Nothing but the sight of the green mound above my dear wife’s grave, which I see now from the window, could induce me to con-

tinue. I believe I shall feel myself drawn nearer to her while I write.

At the appointed time, as the sun was peeping over the wide expanse of ocean, our little boat, with sail hoisted, was scudding along before the morning breeze.

"Ah, this is life," said George. "I wish I might feel the breeze in my face and be rocked by the waves forever. How free we are here with nothing to battle with but the elements, and they are more kind than humanity. Isn't it grand, old fellow?"

"It does very well while the sea is quiet," I replied; "but let the waves be disturbed, and you'll not find it so pleasant."

"But even if the waves destroy you, they give you a grave; society often destroys and leaves you to decay. Do you know," said George, after musing for some time, "that I used to be afraid of the waves? How foolish! It was only because I didn't understand them. I was out on a lake once with a friend when a

storm came up. I couldn't swim, and I begged him to take me to land, but he laughed and said he'd introduce me to the grandeur of the elements. I coaxed and swore and threatened to no purpose, and when the storm struck our skiff I repeated the little prayer I hadn't thought of for many years and waited for the end. 'What can be grander than a war of the elements?' said he. 'Don't be frightened. Neither the wind nor the wave has anything against you or me. Look how the water rolling in little mountains before the force of its tormentor never leaves us in the valley to be submerged by the next rushing billow, but bears us gently out of danger. My friend, you live out in the great world, where noise and bustle and love and hatred are, and where lives are crushed continually. I live by this little lake. Beneath its surface I find my food; on its bosom I seek my pleasure; under the shade trees along its margin I have my hut where I sleep and pray. When its smooth sur-

face is tormented by the storm, I ride on its waves and am happy. Soon I shall be no more and they'll bury me on the shore yonder beneath the palm, where my soul can hear the moan of the driven waves or feel the quiet of the lake's glassy surface. I don't envy you the great world that is unknown to me.' Do you know, Andy," said my friend, "since that day, whenever the storm's fury is greatest I ride the waves."

"What an enviable life this fisherman's was," I said sarcastically. (I had always been matter of fact, and could not then appreciate the romantic turn of my companion.) "I, myself, had a little experience on the water, to which you shall listen. Meantime, let's get nearer land; my stomach's continually crying twelve o'clock."

"Suppose we take a pull at the flask?"

"No; I came to think and enjoy, not to drink liquor."

"Have your own way; let's have the story."

“I want to prove to you that bravery comes more often from fear than confidence,” I began. “About four years ago I was visiting a cousin of mine who lives in a small town on a large river. One Sunday, with a friend of his, we rowed about three miles up stream to a bathing place, and after the usual amount of fun customary on such occasions we started down stream for home, keeping out of the current as we had done on the up trip. The river was swollen and very rapid.

“‘Why not go out into the current?’ I asked. ‘We’ve had enough sport for once, and I’m getting hungry.’ (My stomach always was my master, you know. There never was a time that I wouldn’t brave any sort of danger to run up against a square meal.) One of the fellows said it was dangerous to go out into the main channel, to which I answered, ‘What do I care?’ and we turned our little boat into the stream. All went well until we got opposite the town and attempted to land. There was

a steamer just below the point where we wanted to tie up.

“ ‘We can land in front of her all right,’ said my cousin.

“ ‘No,’ I said, ‘we’d better drift by and land below. Before he had time to answer we were caught by the swift current and dashed against the steamer. The bows struck hard together and our little skiff was very badly stove in. I was in the stern with a short oar, which I had used in guiding us. When we struck our boat turned completely around, and I found myself in front, standing on the seat, with all the wisdom I ever possessed frightened away, but with a determination I’ve never felt since. With the oar I kept the boat from being drawn under the steamer, and when we drifted safely to land below the crowd cheered me again and again for my coolness and bravery.’ ”

“Do you call that bravery?” asked George.
“I don’t.”

"No? Pray, my learned friend, what was it then?"

"The animal instinct of self-preservation. Bravery isn't an instinct. It is the execution of a thought; the studied placing of yourself in danger for the protection of your fellow. But we are not reaching land, and see, there's a squall right on us."

"Take the oars and pull hard," I cried. "We must reach land before the gale strikes us. Pull with all your might, George. I'll take in the sail."

"All right; but don't be frightened. This old shell will weather a pretty stiff breeze."

"It wouldn't last a minute," I answered. Before I could reach the canvas the wind struck it and dipped the bow of the boat. Fortunately, the mast was brash and snapped off, and sail and all fell into the water. I cut the ropes and let it drift away.

"Good bye, George," I shouted in terror. "We're gone."

“Not yet; she rides beautifully. Ah! this is living.”

“Yes,” I shuddered. “At a pace that ends very quickly. My God! will you sit there and laugh when you may be dead in five minutes?”

“Why not?”

“Why? Man, you have a soul.”

He did not answer. His hat was gone, and his long black hair was flying about his face. From his eyes shot a fire which seemed either to defy or sympathize with the lightning, while into the face of the storm he hurled a wild song, the words of which seemed to have burned into my brain, for I have never forgotten them:

“Jove, with your thunderbolts,
King of the elements,
Holding high carnival out on the sea;
Unleash your lightnings,
Split up the universe,
All of your fury frightens not me.”

While he sang I hid my face in the bottom of the boat, and prayed for deliverance. “Get

up, Andy," I heard him saying ; " the storm is past, and the boat's scudding like mad over the water. You are missing rare sport, old fellow."

I raised my head and looked about. " Where are we ?" I asked.

" I haven't an idea."

" Do you know in what direction we are going ?"

" No."

" Have you a compass ?"

" No."

" I can't see land anywhere."

" So much the better : we'll have our two weeks' cruise in earnest. Suppose we eat something. Come, old fellow, don't get the blues. We've got provisions for two weeks, and we'll be picked up long before that,"

" But we haven't any water," I replied.

" Come, that is serious. But we have two gallons of water in the jug, and there are the two cases of porter and the flask of brandy. That isn't so bad."

"That will soon be gone."

"We'll have to make the best of it," he replied. "Two gallons are more than no water at all. We'll drink the porter first and then the water. We must save the brandy for emergencies."

"And after they are gone?" I inquired eagerly, as if expecting a satisfactory answer. But he did not answer, and we sat looking at each other for some time. Even my light-hearted friend, who looked at the bright side of everything, shuddered at the thought of death from thirst. He laughed at the storm, but he saw no mercy in an empty water jug.

"Let's not begin by drowning ourselves in misery," he said. "Get something to eat while I bail out the water."

After a lunch during which, despite our fear of thirst, we lessened our stock of porter by two bottles, we lit our pipes and trying to forget our surroundings, indulged in pleasantries until night settled down upon us. Then, both

very much exhausted by the excitement of the day, we soon fell asleep, and lay unconscious through the long, dark night, while our little boat sped on before the wind.

When I awoke I found the sky overcast with dull, gray clouds. In the bottom of the boat lay my friend, tossing restlessly. A look at his flushed face showed that fever had seized him. I put my hand to his forehead and found it burning, while his lips moaned piteously, "water, water."

"Good God," I groaned, no doubt he has been calling for water all night, while I've been sleeping as peacefully as if I had been at home in my own bed. I wonder if I can't feed the fever with porter and save the water for George. I'll try it pretty soon, but now the poor fellow must have water." I hauled out the jug and filled a tin cup, which I held for him while he drank. "Does that taste good, George?" I asked anxiously.

"There he goes ; there he goes. Now's your

chance. Mind you don't hit the hounds, Andy."

"Poor boy," I murmured to myself, "it looks as if he had taken his last hunt."

I ate a scanty breakfast, and sat down opposite my friend to smoke and think. All day long I sat there, only rising now and then to give him water.

Being out of sight of land, with ominous looking clouds hanging over you, with a man in high fever for your companion, and only two gallons of water—less one day's use—for drink, is not conducive to pleasant thoughts. Nevertheless, I got through the day and the entire night somehow—watching, thinking, smoking. I hadn't the heart to go to sleep with George calling incessantly for water. And then, to think of the time when the jug would be empty! When the morning came again George seemed more quiet and I lay down for a few minutes' sleep. "Just five minutes," I thought. "He

can't suffer much in five minutes, and I must sleep some time."

Some minutes later I awoke with a start to find him in a high state of delirium. He was on his knees in the bottom of the boat talking wildly. In his hand he held a bottle of porter, while another was just dropping into the water ten feet away. One case was entirely gone, as were also the provisions, and in the remaining case were only five bottles. "Quick, men!" he shouted, "get her cargo over, or we go to the bottom. She can't last another minute!" With a sort of frenzy I threw myself upon the delirious man and forced him to the bottom of the boat. "Great Heavens, George!" I cried, "you are committing suicide."

"Ha! ha! Andy, that's a good joke. It'll cost you a dollar for a new glass."

"George! George! keep quiet. I shall be as mad as yourself in another hour if this keeps up. Ah, poor boy! how many days of life you have cut off. But of course you didn't know.

If only you were on shore I would arrange this matter very quickly--there are better ways to die than starving. Five bottles of porter and a gallon of water," I said aloud; "that will last about three days."

All day long George called incessantly for water, and I had no heart to refuse him. I watched constantly to see a speck on the horizon, but in vain. Night again settled down upon us, and I prayed God in the bitterness of my heart to send a storm and destroy us. From the bottom of the boat came nothing but the cry of "water, water!" and the jug was empty. As I sit here writing, I marvel how I ever lived through that terrible night. Surely God has been good to me. I was exhausted and terribly thirsty, for I had not tasted the water nor the porter--my friend must have them. As for the brandy, I searched for it but it was gone.

The third morning dawned gloomier than the others. I scanned the horizon long and earn-

estly in the hope of seeing a sail, but there was nothing to break the monotonous stretch of cruel waves. Only two bottles of porter remained in the case. How I wished for one of them! I can only excuse the selfishness of the thought in that I was very faint and dizzy. With a sudden frenzy I grasped one of the bottles and opened it. "Water, water," came in piteous moans from my poor friend's lips. "Yes, George, I was just getting it for you," and I poured out a cupful of the liquor and held his head while he drank. With a great effort I found courage to replace the cork.

About noon a sail appeared on the horizon. O, joy! joy! There was nothing left in the boat with which to make a signal, and taking off my coat I tied the sleeves to an oar and waved it until I sank back exhausted. An hour passed, however, and the ship went on out of sight; and as I watched her sails disappear I prayed that I might be deprived of reason. My prayer seemed almost answered. I did not

again put on my coat, but threw it overboard with the oar. It would only be a few more days at most until I would be dead, and the cold added nothing to my misery.

George called again for water and I gave him all the porter there was left. "There, George, that's all," I said. "Now let us settle back and die like men. It will be easy for you, for you no longer feel. May be, too, you will go first; but for me——." I was too weak to think, and could only lie and stare at my friend in the other end of the boat.

Night came and went, and the day, and again the darkness settled down upon us. Incessantly the piteous pleading for water came from my friend's feverish lips, and I could only put my fingers to my ears and shudder.

On the seventh morning the fever had left George, but from the wild, vacant look in his eyes I saw that his reason too was gone. Suddenly he raised himself on one knee, and snatching his knife from his belt, with a hideous

chatter he plunged it into his throat. Clutching the hilt convulsively he pulled the blade out and fell forward, his breast resting on the seat and his head hanging downward.

When I saw what my friend had done, all that was human in me seemed to forsake me; an awful desire seized me, and grasping the tin cup I crawled forward and held it out; then I knew no more—I had fainted.

CHAPTER II.

When I opened my eyes in consciousness the day was dawning. I knew not how many times the sun had risen since I fainted. I was lying on the shore of some strange land, my head resting on a bed of mignonette. At my feet the great ocean crowded its ripples upon the sand. In the east the first faint streaks of dawn were visible, and one by one the stars crept rapidly into hiding. In the west perfect night reigned unmolested. I would that my pen could picture the grandeur of that scene, but my arm trembles and my heart has lost the poetry of youth. Even age, however, has not dimmed my memory, and I can still see the morning star in trembling brilliancy on the horizon, and feel the cool breeze fan my cheek as it came that day wafted to me from the great sea. Above my head a stately palm waved in gentle motion. My soul within me cried "Par-

adise," and the word escaped my lips in a low murmur. As from some kindred spirit in pity of my delusion, I heard a faint sigh, and turning my head saw a lithe and graceful female bending over me, and a pair of liquid eyes gazing on me in sadness. In my still weak condition I fancied that I had been transported to another world.

"Have you come to welcome me to Paradise, fair spirit?" I faltered. At the sound of my voice she started, as if waking from a dream, then looked at me earnestly for some moments and sighed:

"Had I known thou wouldst call me 'you' I fear thou hadst died a castaway 'ere I had nursed thy life through the vigils of so many nights."

"Alas, fair maiden, how have I offended? I did but use the language of my country; yet if there be one word in my mother tongue that grates upon thy senses, I'll discard it. But tell me, what land is this, and who art thou?"

"This is the Isle of Feminine, ruled by the immortal queen, Diana. As for myself, I am but a little light allowed to flicker in her brilliancy, not quite mortal nor yet immortal; they call me Vesta. Who art thou, fair sir? I did find thee cast by the waves upon the beach, naked and lifeless."

"My princess Vesta," I replied "(for I judge thou art a princess of the royal house), I am the victim of a folly. A friend and I started in a frail craft to cruise along the borders of our State, but the wind drove us out to sea. My friend was taken with a fever, and in a delirium, while I slept, threw our provisions overboard. For several days we drifted aimlessly about, until he went mad and died by his own hand. After that I remember nothing, for I lost consciousness." At the memory of those dreadful hours I burst into a violent fit of weeping.

"Weep not in memory of the past," said Vesta. "I fear thy troubles are not ended,

for thou art the first stranger who has ever touched our shores, and I know not how the queen will take thy coming. What is thy name?"

"Andrew Lowe."

"What a hideous appellation! Speak it not again. I will rechristen thee and call thee 'Angelo,' and remember thou sayest not 'Andrew Lowe' before the queen whom thou must later meet, or she will kill thee for a heathen."

"I shall remember thine instructions," I said, somewhat frightened, but yet amused at her aversion to my name. What a strange land I had reached, where to say 'you' was an unpardonable vulgarity, and a stranger's life depended much upon his cognomen. Here, however, I was, and to make the best of things seemed highly in order.

After saying over to myself many times my new name, I felt ready for further instructions.

"Pray, fair Vesta," I began, "if there be anything else offensive in my language it were

well thou didst inform me, for I came from a land where the people are free and defective speech is not a punishable offense. Tell me what must not be said or done. Thou saidst the 'immortal queen;' is she truly? How long has she lived, and from whence came she. I note thou speakest the same language as myself, hence I judge this is a colony governed by the laws of England; and I fear Her Majesty might not be pleased to hear her subjects call another queen."

"I know not England," replied Vesta; "this land is ruled by none save Diana, and she is immortal; she has seen the oldest tree spring from the ground."

"She must be very old indeed. Does she still retain her sight, and has she strength to rule her people?"

"Thy jests are but poor payment for the weary hours I spent in nursing thee back to life, my Angelo."

"Alas, fair Vesta, I speak seriously. In

mine own country, at sixty a woman is seldom beautiful, and at eighty, if she lives so long, she is helpless. I but judged of Queen Diana from what is true of mine own people."

"Wouldst thou count me fair among the women of thy land?" asked Vesta.

"Princess, I never saw a beauty to compare with thine. Thine eyes alone would turn the heads of all the men in my country. Thou art more beautiful than our poets picture angels."

I detected a faint smile flit across the beautiful countenance of the princess as I said this.

"When thou seest the queen," she answered, "thou wilt think me hideous. But the sun has started on his course, and I must to the palace. Thou wilt find food and wine 'neath yonder bush, and see thou wander not far from this place until I come again. If any find thee here, say thou art Vesta's guest, lest harm come to thee. Yet, stay; I will give thee my signet ring to insure thee against injury. When thou art not eating and drinking, as I believe from thy

gaunt look thou wilt be most of the time, repeat thy new name, and address the trees as thou," she said, smiling, and I soon lost sight of her among the bushes as she hurried away.

Vesta was not long from my sight when a deep melancholy seized me, and a profound grief for the loss of my friend. Poor George! What a gay, light-hearted, careless fellow he was! I could scarce believe he was gone forever. I wondered very much what had become of his body and of our boat, and walked as best I could along the beach for some distance in the hope that I might find some trace of them; but I wandered so far I almost lost the way, yet was disappointed to no purpose. Perhaps the princess had found them, and to allay my sadness, had hidden them away. When I returned to the palm under which I first opened my eyes on this strange island, I felt faint and hungry and went to the bush where Vesta had said I should find food and wine. I found them as she had promised, but

instead of bread and meat as I had expected, there was only a large basket of fruit in variety. Nevertheless, I ate with a relish, and the fine quality of the wine more than repaid my disappointment at the food. I had never tasted anything like it in all my life, and drank too much, I fear, for I no sooner reached the palm again than I fell into a deep slumber.

When I awoke the sun was past the meridian.

After again tasting the excellent wine, I took a handful of the fruit and started along the coast in the opposite direction from my walk in the morning, hoping that I might yet be able to find some trace of my poor friend. The fair Vesta had not neglected my wardrobe, and I felt very awkward at first in the long gown that came to my feet and the strange sandals that replaced my shoes.

I stopped suddenly in my walk and stood bewildered, for a bright light flashed across my face as though some one was reflecting the

sun's rays in my eyes with a mirror. Looking about, I saw in the distance a great dome towering above the trees. The sun was shining against the side next to me, and I could not look long towards it on account of its dazzling brightness, but I judged the entire dome to be of pure gold. I pondered a long time on what it was, possibly the palace in which lived the royal family.

The sun was nearing the western horizon when I returned, and was much startled to find a man sitting beneath the palm. As I approached he asked with much respect if I was the stranger called Angelo.

As he arose I saw that he was very low of stature and altogether a poor specimen of manhood to my thinking.

"How does my name concern thee?" I asked, distrustful.

"If thou art Angelo, the stranger, guest of the fair Princess Vesta, I am to know thee by her signet ring upon thy finger."

I held out my hand.

"I see thou art the man I was sent to inquire after and to learn if thy food or wine needed replenishing," he said.

"Art thou the fair Vesta's servant?" I inquired.

He turned quite pale at my speech, and his eyes flashed, but he answered with deference and much dignity :

"I am father of Vesta, seventh princess of the house of Diana, youngest and fairest of all her children. I am Alleman, favored above all men in the kingdom. I see thou art indeed a stranger to this land."

"I beg thou wilt pardon mine ignorance," I answered, ashamed of my error ; "I owe thee more respect that thou art father of the princess, but for whose kindness I should now lie dead upon the beach."

"Thine error was most natural, and I forgive it," he answered. "But can I get thee nothing? Dost thou find the wine to thy

liking? I have brought another robe that the dews of the night may not fall upon thee."

"The wine is most excellent, and thou art very kind to remember the robe."

"Thou must thank the princess," he replied. "She will come to see thee when the full moon rises."

"Pray, good Alleman," I said, after a pause, "what is the religion of thy people?"

"It were better, in order that thou mayst learn the right, thou tell me of thine own beliefs, that I may inform thee wherein thou dost err."

I smiled at this assurance, but answered him:

"First, good Alleman, the people of my country believe in one God, supreme, invisible; He has power over the destiny of man and all things."

"I see," he said, "that thou art sprung from a race devoid of understanding, and I pity thee. What a sad spectacle it must be to see

men clinging blindly to an illusion, to fall upon their faces to a thing invisible, and which has not the power to make itself manifest."

To this amusing speech I replied :

" I thank thee, Alleman, for thy pity, but in order that I may remain in ignorance no longer than is necessary, pray inform me whom I should worship."

" I will instruct thee, and pray thou never forget my words while thou dost here abide. The princess hath informed thee, no doubt, that the great Queen Diana is immortal—as by her grace is Vesta also—and that she it is who watches over our lives and allots us places of rest in the hereafter according to our merits."

" Dost thou worship a woman?" I inquired, with scorn.

" Come, father of the fair Vesta, let us reason this matter, and I will endeavor to show thee that the being I worship is the true God, and that the queen thou callest immortal is of his handiwork."

"Dost thou think I would madly rush into yonder waves and die?" he cried aghast. "Even though I am favored above all men, and am permitted, on account of my relation to the seventh princess of the house, to walk in the shadow of the palace, I know the bound to my liberties too well to listen to the speech of an heretic. If thou wouldst live to see the sun rise many times, it were well thou gavest no tongue to the ignorance of thine heart."

With that he turned and sped away among the shrubbery, leaving me amazed and fearful. I knew not what moment he might return with a summons for me to appear before the queen to answer for mine heresy. I sat down beneath the palm, wondering what strange thing would happen to me next, and had my boat been on the beach at that moment I think I should have again trusted myself to the mercy of the waves.

I wondered if the beautiful Vesta would pro-

tect me against any harm. She had spent long hours in watching and nursing me back to life, and she seemed very kind, but I knew not whether she had taken pity on my distressed condition, or whether I was being kept for a sacrifice to the immortal queen on the next fete day. Altogether I was quite miserable.

I thought of my own country and my dear home with its kindly faces and wondered if I should ever be permitted to see them again; at present it seemed hopeless. In my loneliness I offered up the first prayer since I had reached this strange land, and I prayed long and fervently. When I arose the full moon threw its earliest beams through the tree tops. I remembered the promise of Alleman:

“When the full moon rises she will come to visit thee,” and, despite my fear of Vesta, I was joyed that I was so soon to be in her presence again.

All nature seemed to be sleeping and there

was not even a cricket's chirp to break the silence.

A neighboring columbine filled the air with its fragrance, and the sweet odor of the night-blooming cereus soothed my senses.

Before me the great sea quietly rolled its waves toward the beach. All the inquietude within me rested as though awed by this serene spectacle of nature's grandeur, and my heart was full of joy, even though the cruel sea had buried my dear friend, and my home and loved ones were separated from me by its boundless waters. I pray God to send such another evening at the going out of my life, which I know must be before the seasons change many times.

As the moon's beams wandered from the branches and cast themselves on the grass at my feet, I heard the soft tread of footsteps, and, turning, beheld the princess. She seemed carried along by the gentle breeze, so quietly did she approach.

"Thou art come!" I exclaimed simply at gladness of seeing her.

"Is Angelo surprised that I am here? Thou didst have my promise," she said. "Did my father bring thee food and a robe for thy greater comfort?"

"Princess," I replied, "thou hast misinterpreted my speech if it contained a doubt to thee. I knew the radiance of thine immortal face should shine upon me as surely as the moon rose. Thine honored father brought me all thou sayest, and I fear I repaid his kindness with incivility. Alas, princess, I despair of learning the ways of thy people. Thy father told me he worshiped the Queen Diana, and I but tried to show him in my simple way how that there was a greater yet than she whom he revered, and he ran away from me as though I was a thing accursed.

"Thou wert very foolish in thy speech, and my father is greatly agitated by his discovery of an heretic, as he is pleased to name thee.

He pleaded with me to withdraw the protection of my signet ring and give thee up to the queen as a reviler of the true faith. I fear thou hast made him thy mortal enemy."

"And wilt thou hearken to him, my princess?" I plead, trembling with fear.

"Nay, fear not," she answered; "thou hast eaten of the fruit of my gathering and hast had my protection; no dagger lurks in the kindness of Vesta."

I fell at her feet and kissed the tips of her sandals.

"Rise, Angelo, and save thine homage for the Queen, whom thou must meet tomorrow. Thine indiscretion has made it impossible to keep thee longer concealed, and I have come to prepare thee for thy visit."

"O, princess," I cried; "I fear to meet the dread Diana."

"There is no need; take heed thou offendest not and all will be well. If she ask thee questions, answer truthfully and without hesi-

tation, for the queen can detect a lie, and the punishment is death to thy mortal body and the transportation of thy soul to eternal darkness. Do not cringe before her, nor yet be too lavish of the compliments thou art wont to couch in pretty language, for though I smile when thou sayest I am comely, remember Diana is the creator of all beauty."

"I will remember thine instructions," I answered.

"Then have no fear for thy reception."

"My Princess Vesta," I ventured, after a short silence; I saw today, glistening in the sunlight, a great golden dome. Is that the Queen's palace?"

"Thou shalt see."

"On the morrow?"

"On the morrow. It were well for thee to sleep now, that thou mayst be refreshed against the morrow."

"By your leave, I had rather feast mine eyes upon thy loveliness, for I am not weary."

"Sleep!" she commanded, and lying down by the trunk of the palm, I wrapped about me the robe Alleman had brought, and soon felt the presence of Vesta only in my dream.

CHAPTER III.

On the morrow I arose with the sun, and, after bathing my face in the stream which ran near by, was ready for whatever the day might bring forth.

I had expected the fair Vesta would come to guide me to the palace of the dread Diana, and you may imagine with what surprise and fear I saw coming through the grove towards me the favored Alleman with some dozen attendants, each appearing to be of less significance than the other. They all wore robes of brilliant hues as though dressed for some important fete, and the thought of a human sacrifice, of which I should be the victim, filled me with horror. I reasoned that the princess would have come in person to introduce me into the presence of Diana if evil were not intended; but still, I remembered her promise

that no harm should befall me and was somewhat reassured.

As he approached, Alleman made me a low obeisance, while his attendants fell upon their knees and bowed their uncovered heads. Alleman seemed to have forgotten our conversation of the previous evening and greeted me pleasantly.

"My Angelo," he said, "I am come from the Princess Vesta to greet thee with the morning."

"Thou art the worthy father of my princess, and I thank thee for thine hospitality," I replied.

"I beg thou wilt accept mine apology for the seeming rudeness in leaving thee so suddenly on yesterday eve, but I forgot thou wast a stranger to our ways."

"Good Alleman, it is I must needs ask thy forgiveness that I forgot the courtesy due mine honored host."

"Rather say, then, that we both did err, and

let us forget, I pray thee, whatever may have been unkind in the speech of the other."

"With all my heart," I replied, joyed that my unhappy utterances were so readily forgotten, and I grasped his hand with much fervor.

"Illustrious stranger," he began, "I am the bearer of a summons from Vesta, seventh princess, to appear in my company before the palace at the third hour of the day. That hour is fast approaching, and I beg thou wilt accompany me. I have brought thee a robe of finer texture than the one thou wearest, with which, I pray, thou wilt attire thy person."

I thanked him and soon found myself covered with a robe of some very fine material, and pure white. When I approached Alleman in my new garment, he gave me a girdle made of fine gold, and a dagger, the hilt of which was studded with jewels, while about my neck he placed, with his own hands, a necklace of gold beads. After admiring my attire in silence for some minutes, he said :

“Stranger, thou art indeed fair to look upon, and I think the queen will be pleased with thine appearance.” I thanked him, and we started on our journey to the palace.

I soon found myself in a broad avenue hedged on either side by bushes laden with full-blown roses, so sweet and perfect I discovered not a blight on any of them, while above our heads the branches met in rich verdure. Rare flowers sprang up on every side and perfumed the air with rich fragrance. I was enchanted with the grandeur of the scenery.

“Good Alleman,” I ventured, as we walked along; “thinkest thou the majestic queen would permit me to remain in this land, her loyal and devoted subject?”

“As for remaining,” replied Alleman, “I see not how thou wilt do otherwise, being the first stranger who has ever touched our shores. The ships of thy nation come not in sight. But as to becoming a subject, the slave of the immortal queen presumeth not to venture an opinion.”

“But what is thine impression,” I persisted. “Surely there can be no presumption in what thou sayest to me as a private individual.”

“Privately and with much respect, I would ask if thou couldst so readily discard thy beliefs and worship at a strange altar?”

I was somewhat taken aback at this unexpected question, but answered him :

“Thou knowest, worthy Alleman, how prone man is to err, and if I were convinced after much teaching that Diana had charge over the destiny of man, wouldst thou think ill of me did I worship her?”

“I know not what to answer thee, but I am sure there is nothing would make me falter in my belief.” Further conversation was interrupted, for at that moment there broke upon my sight such a mass of brilliant beauty that I stood entranced; we had come in full view of the royal palace. At first sight I could discern nothing but a splendid pile of gold and precious stones springing up in the midst of a tropical

verdure that could not be surpassed in richness of beauty. I saw that the palace was octagon in shape and that the main structure seemed entirely of onyx; at either corner were two massive pillars of jasper richly carved and inlaid with gold. The entire building was surmounted by a dome of pure gold. As we approached this wonderful structure I discovered over the entrance an arch of emerald supported by richly carved pillars of amethyst, and when I saw in the midst of this arch, in letters made with diamonds, the sentence,

PALACE OF PERPETUAL LIFE,

I halted in amazement and whispered my guide:

“I no longer doubt the immortality of thy queen.”

“Judge not yet,” he replied; when thou hast but beheld her handiwork.”

We were distant from the palace about three hundred yards when Alleman informed me that we might not at present go nearer, and that

he must leave me to enjoy myself as best I could in company with his escort while he went to inform the royal household of my near approach. When he had gone, I looked so long upon the palace, that my eyes pained me from gazing at such gorgeousness. Then I turned my attention to the beings about me. They were twelve in number; the tallest of them not more than four and a half feet in height. Each man's face wore the stamp of servitude and degradation. I shuddered that the estate of man should have grown so lowly, even in this unknown island. From the time they had fallen down before me under the palm, up to this present moment, not one of them had uttered a word, and I wondered if they had so far degenerated as to have lost the power of speech. In order that I might know the truth of the matter, I addressed the most evil looking amongst them, and asked him his name.

"Great stranger," he replied, shrinking with-

in himself as much as possible, "I am called Mullane."

"Art thou a servant of the great Diana?"

"May it please thee, illustrious man, the lowliest of her slaves am I."

"What position dost thou hold?" I inquired further.

"Master," he answered, "I carry the bodies of mortals to the brink of the dark stream which conveys them to the hereafter when the immortal queen is pleased that they should depart the island."

"Where is this river of which thou speakest?" I asked, but he only pointed toward the earth, and would say no further word, although I urged him to answer my question. Finding him obstinate, I let him alone, and began to study the magnificence about me.

The sun had sped about the fourth of his journey. Aside from my escort there was not a being visible. To my left, and about a quarter of a mile distant, I saw a number of houses

standing on either side of a shady avenue, but there was not a soul to be seen. Even the houses seemed to be sleeping, as they lay there beneath the tall trees, surrounded by fragrant roses.

I stood looking toward this little village, wondering what could keep the inhabitants in hiding on such a beautiful morning, when I was suddenly aroused by the shrill blast of a bugle, and, as if by magic, there appeared in the village street a great number of men and women, who immediately began to march toward me, the females coming first, and the men closing in the rear with their disgusting insignificance. As soon as they began to approach, my escort fell upon their knees, and bowing their heads, remained immovable.

As the people came nearer, I remarked that the females were all attired in garments of pure white, and that they were lithe of form and beautiful. I thought at the time that all the old women had remained indoors, but

learned afterwards that they retained their beauty for many years, and that the rushing stream of which Mullane told me something, saved them from the horror of growing old.

As the foremost approached, she looked shyly into my eyes and said :

“ By command of the immortal queen, we have come to greet thee, fair stranger ;” and kissing my hand, she moved away. This pleasing ceremony was repeated until my hand had been imprinted by the lips of more than five hundred beautiful women. When they had formed an arc on my right, the men approached, and one by one fell upon their faces and kissed my robe. The sight of these men groveling before me filled my soul with disgust, and I marveled that the women had treated me with such marked respect when they had driven to degradation my sex of their own land.

The men formed a group on my left while ten females appeared at the entrance of the palace and drew across the smooth surface to-

ward us a car which, on near approach, I discovered to be a chair of state, up to which led three steps on either side. Above was spread a canopy of gold cloth to ward off the sun. No sooner was the car stopped, than the maidens spread around and before it rich rugs, placing directly opposite me one of greater beauty than the others. All these arrangements completed, they retired again to the entrance of the palace from which issued immediately Diana and the seven princesses of her house. At sight of the queen all the beautiful females on my right bent the knee and five hundred musical voices shouted, "All hail to the immortal queen;" while the men fell upon their faces and repeated with much groaning, the words I had heard issue from the lips of Alleman: "May the frown of her wrath never fall upon me."

Not knowing what was expected of me, I remained perfectly motionless.

The queen was seated in her chair of state and the six princesses reclined on the steps

leading up to her. The Princess Vesta came forward, and taking my hand led me before the queen. Up to that time I had not found courage to look upon Diana, and now, when I saw her face, I started at beholding her immortal beauty.

“Angelo,” said Vesta, “I have brought thee into the presence of Queen Diana.”

“Dread queen, I greet thee with an humble heart.”

“Rise, fair stranger,” said Diana, and her words thrilled me like an electric shock; “for I see thou art not used to bow the knee to the ruler of thy country, and as yet thou owest me no homage. Now that thou art recovered somewhat from the fatigue of thy perilous journey, tell me what thou thinkest of the Isle of Feminine?”

“Infinite being,” I replied, “my countryman’s dream of immortality is not fairer than thine island; as for thyself and the seven princesses of thine house, it would ill become

the tongue of mortal man to presume a comment on thine immortal beauty."

The fair Vesta, seated at the feet of Diana, smiled upon me as though well pleased at my deportment.

"Vesta," said the queen, "bid thy father dismiss my subjects, yet send my command that they appear again before the palace when the moon has risen, to further welcome our stranger guest with merriment and the dance. Fair Angelo," she continued, turning to me, "I may not be capable of returning thee presently to thy country, for no vessels pass our shores, and among my subjects are no men skilled in craft building, but I trust thou wilt not pine too much for thine home, and, may be, some day thou wilt be content to remain on this island. I have sent away my people that they may not weary thee, and now, that Vesta has returned, we will descend from our chair, and, if it please thee, we will walk down an avenue to the beach, where I will have fruit and wine

brought for our refreshment. What say ye, my princesses, to my proposal?"

They answered with one voice:

"The queen's pleasure is ours."

"And what sayeth Angelo?"

"My queen," I replied, "I am thy servant."

"Now, by my power, thou sayest not true; thou art the queen's guest."

"I am unworthy the great honor the queen is pleased to bestow."

"Nay, I cannot believe so fair a form could contain a soul that is vile."

"Great Diana, I meant not that, but I remember, thou art immortal."

"Thou didst mean nothing at all to my thinking," she said, and, for the first time, I saw her smile. "I believe thou art come from a land where man is superior to woman in intellect and wisdom, and, in pity of their weakness, is ever pleasing them with pretty sayings. Am I not right, my Angelo?"

"It is true, O queen, that, in my country,

man's intellect is superior in the main, but, to say as much there would bring about mine ears such a whirr of feminine protest that I should do well to escape with my sense of hearing.

Said Melpomene, first princess of the house :

“ Here, thou seest, it is different.”

“ My princess,” I replied, somewhat sadly, “ I have noted.”

Then spake Thalia, the blue-eyed, golden-haired, laughing Thalia, sixth princess of the house :

“ My Angelo, tell us something of thine home. Is it as large as our island ?”

“ I cannot tell,” I replied, “ until I know the extent on thine island.”

“ It is very large—our shores measure more than eighty furlongs.”

“ And thou thinkest thine island so great, I fear thou wilt doubt when I say that the shores of my country measure many thousand furlongs, and that the cities are many which

would cover more square miles than is in thy kingdom."

"And are all the men as fair and strong as thou," asked Thalia.

I flushed with pleasure that I had come to a land where I was counted fair, for at home my mother used to say :

"All the beauty thou hast, shines from thine honest heart, Andrew." Yet, I answered Thalia truthfully, that she would wrong my countrymen to judge of them by my own unprepossessing features. The queen, who had remained silent for a long time, now addressed me:

"Stranger," she said, "I have noticed, in all thy praise of my kingdom, no approval of our men."

"Great queen," I replied, "Alleman, father of the fair Princess Vesta, has treated me with much kindness."

"Thine answer is fair and courteous, but our men are not like thee, Angelo; thou dost put them to shame, and I like it not."

“If I be taller than they, it is the fault of my creator,” I answered.

“But I would have them like unto thee.”

“That can never be,” was my unhappy comment.

“What sayest thou?” she questioned, quickly, and I saw a strange fire in her eye. “Thinkest thou there is anything impossible to the immortal queen? But live, and I will show thee men so tall and fair thou shalt hide away for shame.”

I was about to make reply, but I read the meaning of Vesta's look, and was silent. When we returned to the palace, the queen led me to a magnificent tent, which had been raised during our absence, and was just so far away that the shadow of the palace fell not upon it. The queen noticed the position, and immediately had Alleman brought before her. When he appeared, trembling and humble, she frowned darkly upon him, and I feared it was all over with poor Alleman.

"Did I not bid thee, Alleman," she said, "to place the stranger's tent beneath the branches of yonder tree, in order that he might be sheltered from the midday sun?"

"Dread queen, thou didst so command, but when I went to pitch the tent, I found the shadow of the palace fell upon it."

"And thou wouldst have no other man in my kingdom favored as thou art? Place the tent as I commanded thee and for thy disobedience, appear not tonight at the dance. Thinkest thou, ignorant man, that I would show my guest less favor than the greatest of my subjects? Stranger," she said, turning to me, "I will leave thee now, and I would advise thee to repose awhile after Alleman has removed thy tent. I will come for thee at eventide."

I set about assisting in the removal of my abode, sorry indeed to have been the unwilling cause of bringing such reproof upon Alleman's head.

“Good Alleman, I regret to have caused thee so much trouble.”

He gave me a malicious look, but did not answer.

“Thou art not angry with me?” I questioned. “I trust thou wilt not think I am trying to steal thine honors, for I had rather remain under a burning sun than incur thy displeasure.”

“It is not out of consideration for thee, but by the queen’s command that I am removing the tent. The sun might burn thee up for all I care,” he answered, sullenly.

“Let us be friends,” I plead, “and I will ask the queen to recall the sentence that banishes thee from tonight’s merriment.”

“Nay, I had rather be banished from the queen’s sight forever than call thee friend. Thou art a serpent come out of the great sea to steal the queen’s love from her royal subjects, and I hate thee.” Saying this, he turned

and walked rapidly away, and I knew he was my enemy.

With a heavy heart, I went inside the tent and lay down to rest. Despite my grief at losing Alleman's friendship, I soon fell into a refreshing sleep, from which I did not awake until the queen came to command my presence at the dance.

When I opened my eyes, Diana was standing before me. Her face shone with a radiance which paled the moonbeams as they fell upon her glossy hair.

"Angelo," she said, in a hurried voice, when she saw that I was awake, "tomorrow I shall issue a decree admitting thee within the gates of the palace, for, though I am immortal and have charge over the souls of men, it extends only to the inhabitants of this island, and I know there are many things in thy great world which I fain would learn. Swear to me, if I admit thee, thou wilt never divulge our conversations whilst thou art my guest."

"Great queen," I replied, very much bewildered, "Thou doest thy servant too much honor, but I swear by thine immortal beauty to do whatever thou dost bid me."

"Nay, stranger, swear by the gods of thine own household."

"I swear," I replied solemnly.

Together we walked out into the moonlight, and far into the night I sat with the queen at my right and Vesta at my left, feasting my eyes on the rich beauty of the dancing women, my senses lulled by the strains of rich music floating from invisible instruments.

CHAPTER IV.

The sun had traveled a fourth of his journey when I arose, for the moon was low when the dancing had ceased and I had sunk upon the rich rugs in my tent to sleep and dream of the eventful day, the pretty dancing maidens and the melodies of hidden harps.

I found in one corner of my tent a great golden basin filled with scented waters which was a joy to me, being now deprived of the sparkling water of the little brook which ran near the palm by the seashore. After performing my morning ablutions, I partook of a breakfast of fruit which seemed to be the only food on the island. I had yet to see any animal wild or domesticated, or any grain growing, and I wondered greatly how the materials were obtained for the rich robes the inhabitants wore. I marveled too, that I had regained my strength without the assistance of

meat, but everything that happened to me now was so strange and unusual that I had come to take things as I found them. Had I been a scientist instead of the plain-going citizen that I was and still am, I most certainly would have died for want of proper nourishment, in that I would not have been able to understand how a man once nourished by animal food could possibly subsist on the fruits of the tropics. But I was too thankful that the sea was not lashing itself into a fury above my bones to question what nourished me and returned my strength.

Wandering toward the village which I was anxious to inspect, I saw coming out of one of the houses many people who turned down the avenue in the direction I was going, and being eager to learn what the matter was I hurried up to them. I found the procession headed by my friend Mullane, followed by four men bearing a body on a litter, and I at once divined that Mullane was performing the duties of his doleful position.

Immediately after the corpse, walked the queen and her household, and behind them the inhabitants. When Diana saw me she motioned me to her side.

“I did not think thou wouldst care to see these rites, else I would have called for thee. This morning I returned the soul of a subject to paradise, and we are conveying his body to the dark river. Wilt thou accompany us?”

“If I do not intrude, my queen, I crave thy permission to do so.”

I walked silently and awed by the side of this immortal being who had in her keeping the souls of her subjects and had power to send them to perdition or paradise as she willed. The more I saw of her power the more I feared her. I knew not what moment she might take offense at some saying of mine and kill me with one look of those unearthly eyes.”

“Diana,” I ventured, “I see no mourners in this funeral train. Had the dead no relatives or friends?”

“Yea, many; but why should any weep because of his transportation to eternal joy?”

“But dost thou inform thy subjects when thou sendest a soul to paradise and likewise when it is doomed to the darkness of hell?”

“Thou must think Diana indeed a cruel queen,” she answered; “that she could bid a soul depart this island and let its friends conjecture of its destination. If I send the father to paradise the child is glad, and if to eternal torment, the offspring weeps until its grief is spent and then forgets. Moreover, I banish no soul to darkness forever. In a generation or two I recall them and let them try again for paradise. I see no reason why there should be any mystery about it. Tell me, Angelo, in thy country when thy friend dies, knowest thou not if his soul wings its flight to paradise?”

“We can only hope,” I replied sadly.

“And if his whole life is given up to slander and hypocrisy, dost thou still hope, Angelo?”

“Yea, great queen, for it is alone with God

to judge, and man knows not but that the expiring breath may have sent a prayer to heaven which unbarred the gates."

"Thou hast a strange religion and I would question thee more concerning it hereafter, but now we have come to the mouth of the cave which leads to the dark river."

As the queen spoke the men came to a halt and placed the pall upon the ground, while all the people gathered about. The face of the dead was uncovered and the inhabitants looked for the last time upon their friend and neighbor. Then, the queen, holding her right hand over the body as if in benediction, bid it adieu.

"Swift be thy journey on the waves of the dark rolling stream which shall carry thee from us forever. The spirit thou didst serve is in paradise with the souls of all those whom Diana loved; henceforth thou art useless to the immortal queen and her subjects."

At the conclusion of the queen's words all the inhabitants fell upon their faces and cried:

“Wise and just and holy is Diana.”

“Mullane,” commanded the queen, “perform the duties of thine office ;” and the queen and her household and all the inhabitants turned to depart.

“My queen,” I said, “I crave thy permission to accompany Mullane on his journey.”

“Thou shalt see little but darkness and hear the madly rushing river dash against the rocks. The way is steep and rugged, and thou art not used to such things, but thou mayest go. Mullane, see no harm comes to the stranger who desires to accompany thee.”

I thanked the queen and followed Mullane with the body thrown across his shoulder into the cave.

We had not gone far, before total darkness surrounded us and I found we were descending into the earth by means of steps cut into the solid rock. I put out my hands and found this strange stairway so narrow I could touch the walls on either side.

Before me I could hear the even tread of Mullane as he walked steadily on, carrying his burden. As we descended deeper and deeper into the bowels of the earth a great fear seized me, my knees trembled and my head grew light. I think I most certainly would have fainted had we not at that moment come to a place where the steps turned suddenly off to the right and I felt a rush of cold air from below which gave me new energy.

Far in the distance beneath I saw a faint light, so dim and hazy as only to be perceptible on account of the intense darkness where I stood.

“Mullane,” I said, “Tell me what is yonder light?”

“Great stranger, the light thou seest is a reflection of the phosphoric arch above the dark river. The queen’s servant before me told me it existed by command of the immortal Diana, to make as cheerful as possible the dreary road we all must travel, but he taught me

very little about this strange way, for he only came with me once and the next time I descended this long flight of stairs he was on my shoulder.

Mullane seemed more at home in this dark alley than in the magnificent groves on the island, and finding him inclined to talk I questioned him as we walked.

"How long hast thou held thine office?" I asked.

"The flowers have blossomed and faded thirty summers since first I listened to the waves dashing madly against the rocks. I was young then, and I loved a pretty maid, but the queen commanded, and Diana lives forever. Now I am old and I have seen nothing but blackness and horror and death, and rushing waters moan continually in mine ears. But I have grown used to it, mighty stranger, and the end can only be a few years distant."

"But hast thou no assistant in thine odious office? Surely the queen does not expect thee

to carry hither thy father and family and give them to the dismal river?"

"Thou art mistaken, for I have carried to this place the body of my father and the graceful form of my mother, but though my heart was broken at the task, no man may murmur at the commands of Diana. When the maiden whom I loved faded away with grief for my slavery, like some tender flower which droops and dies when the sun sends his scorching rays upon it, I came with her down these gloomy steps, not on my shoulder as I carry this body, but folded to my breast, with her sunny curls falling in rich masses over mine arm, and her cold cheek pressed closely against my weather-beaten face. My heart groaned with new misery as each step led me nearer our separation, and when I reached the brink an evil thought possessed me, and I gave not the body of my loved one to the current, but lay it tenderly upon the stone floor and returned again unto the light of day. But the

eye of the queen never sleeps and no sooner had I entered the village than she commanded me to appear before her. I went penitent and afraid to the place where she was, and she said to me kindly, and methought with a tinge of of sadness in her voice:—

“ ‘Mullane, I know thy task is hard and odious, but be of good cheer, for I promise thee by the sacred power of mine eternal throne, that, whatever be thy faults, thou shalt live forever in paradise with the sweet maiden who grieved away her young life in pity of thy slavery.’ ‘And Mullane,’ she added, ‘when three days have elapsed, return again to the river, and if thou hast omitted any part of thy duty, amend thy fault if it lieth in thy power.’ ”

“And didst thou obey the queen’s command?” I inquired eagerly.

“Yea, I did return again on the third day, but we near the river as thou knowest by the sound of dashing waves, and I would ask thee whether the fear of eternal perdition could

persuade thee to obey the queen's direction."

As he spoke we came to the end of that dark stairway which descends, as I learned afterwards, by two thousand steps cut through the solid rock. I found we were standing in a great cavern, the extent of which I could not discern in that dim, hazy light.

Before us swept the dark river.

Mullane, bidding me wait, went forward and deposited his burden on the bosom of the swift current. Returning, he took my hand and led me toward the river. Lying there on the damp stone, with one arm gracefully supporting her head, lay a maiden who seemed in gentle sleep. Bending over her I saw that the spray from the river fell upon her drooping lashes so that she appeared still to grieve for the fate of her lover.

"Tell me, master," whispered Mullane eagerly, "shall I hazard the queen's anger, or must I disturb her peaceful slumber.

For answer I bent and kissed the snowy

forehead before me, while the tears streamed down my weather-beaten face. There are times in the life of a man when he may without weakness weep for the misfortunes of others.

Mullane fell down and kissed my sandals.

"I understand the language of thy silence, O, Angelo, and for thy kindness I shall worship thee hereafter as a god. I did fear thee at first, but I see thou hast a soul that can pity, and I believe thine arm would ever be strong in the defense of the weak."

I took him by the hand and lifted him up, too full of emotion to speak to this man, who for love defied the gods of his religion. Sadly we turned to depart.

"O, Angelo," said Mullane, "I pray that when the queen sends my spirit to the bright land where dwell those I love, thou wilt tell her my story, and persuade her if thou canst, to lay my body down to rest by the side of her who pitied me in life, and broke her gentle spirit in grief for my slavery."

"Be assured, Mullane, the queen knows thy story and that the lovely maiden lies sleeping by the river, better than I might tell; but if I am on the island when thou goest on thy long journey, I will plead with her to grant thy request." As I finished speaking we plunged into the impenetrable darkness again and began our ascent towards the sunlight.

"Hast thou ever noticed the whiteness of my hair?" asked Mullane, when we had traveled half the distance and had come to where the stairway turned.

"I have observed it often," I replied.

"Twenty years ago," he said, "while I was still young, I stepped into this alley with my hair black as the night about me, and when I emerged it was white as you see it now. I was carrying away the body of a young girl, and when I had gotten to this turn I felt the corpse move, and a faint sigh came from the maiden's lips. I grew cold and my hair stood on end. When the dim light of the cavern fell

upon her face I saw that she was looking at me with her large, pleading eyes. I knew not what to do, at first thinking she still lived, but the queen had said the maiden's spirit was in paradise, so I knew she must be dead, and I carried her looking at me as she was to the river's brink, and cast her in. When she touched the water, a shriek escaped her, so shrill and clear that it seemed to pierce the rocks and the echo rebounded from side to side until it died away in a low moan."

"Why," I asked, hurrying on toward the light, "Why didst thou cast her to the devouring waves if life remained in her?"

"The queen had said farewell," he replied, "and though I had never seen the like before, Diana had bidden me convey her to the river and I could but obey. But I cannot understand how that the maiden opened her eyes, and that pitiful shriek still remains in mine ears."

I was overcome with joy when we emerged from that dark stairway and I felt the cool

breeze fan my face. I did not regret the journey, but the horror of what I had seen and heard chilled me.

In the village I met Alleman, who, with a malicious look, gave me a parchment bearing the great seal of the kingdom. With a trembling hand I unrolled it and read :

“To Angelo, the stranger, Diana, the immortal queen, sends greeting. When thou hast rested from thy journey, the queen commands thy presence at the gates of the palace.

“Written by command of the queen, in the year of her reign Three Thousand Five Hundred and Two.

MELPOMENE.”

CHAPTER V.

The sun was low when I appeared at the beautiful entrance of the palace in obedience to the queen's command, and while waiting for admittance I saw the last of his glorious beams paint the tree tops with gold as he sank into the western sea.

I grieved to see the sun set, for I was on the threshold of a mysterious place, and knew not whether for me the glorious orb would ever again rise out of the great deep and fill the world with vapor as he drank up the dews of the night. The will of Diana concerning me remained as much a mystery as on the day I first appeared humbly in her presence. Standing there beneath the jeweled arch, I drank in the rich beauties before me with the eagerness of a man looking for the last time on the world before the light of his eyes faded away forever. My spirit was oppressed with a feeling unde-

fined and dreadful. I stood awaiting my doom and my conscience rested heavy upon me, for had I not under the influence of this dread queen, wavered, nay, almost forsaken the dear religion instilled into me when I lisped at my mother's side.

In the midst of these gloomy thoughts the dark eyes of Melpomene rested upon me, and a voice sweet as the nightingale's song, bade me pass the portals of the palace. All the household save the queen stood to greet me.

"Stranger," said Melpomene, "in the name of the immortal Diana, I welcome thee to the palace of perpetual life."

"The queen's servant is most grateful," I answered.

"Thou art ever humble. Canst thou not remember that the queen considers thee not her servant, but her guest from a far country? Nevertheless, as thou art a man, and the first who ever stood within these sacred walls, I would have thee swear by the truthfulness of thy

religion, thou wilt never divulge whilst on this island, what thou dost here behold.

“I swear.”

“And I,” said the second princess, whose name has faded from my memory (as indeed have also the names of others), “I would have thee swear to touch none of the sacred relics of the palace.”

To each princess I swore according as pleased her until I stood before Thalia.

“Angelo, stranger in a strange land, guest of the immortal queen,” said she, “the comedy of my life suggests nothing sufficiently serious to call for thine oath, but I would thou wouldst ever smile in my presence that I may forget thou art a mortal.”

“O, princess, thou dost bind me to an easy task,” I made answer, “for who could be sad in the sunlight of thy merry eyes?”

Then I saw the seventh princess to whom I owed so much—Vesta, who had nursed me

back to life, and had ever been my friend, and she bade me take no oath :

“ For,” said she, “ I am sure thine honor needs not to be strengthened by vows to the gods of thy religion.”

“ May God forget me, princess, on the day I betray thy confidence,” I answered, my heart filled with gratitude.

“ We must leave thee now, for the queen awaits thy coming,” said Thalia, “ and I trust thou wilt make Diana thy friend forever.”

When they had gone I stood bewildered ; I had but to part the rich hangings to find myself at the foot of the throne, yet I hesitated to accept that honor never before enjoyed by mortal man. From within floated the sound of the lute, so low and sweet that I stood enchanted, nor moved until the music died away ; then I parted the draperies and stood before the queen, who reclined on a low couch where the faint light entered the chamber and fell upon her face. She did not appear to notice my

entrance and I crossed the chamber and knelt down by her side.

"Great queen," I said, "thy servant is here in obedience to thy royal command."

"Thou art welcome to my palace," she answered, and bade me sit down by her side.

"I have been watching the day expire, Angelo. Didst thou ever mark how peacefully it dies away, and how quietly the night is born?"

"I stood but now at the door of the palace, awed by the grandeur of the sun as he sank down to rest in the western sea," I replied.

"It is of the sunset, the gentle breeze, the vast ocean and all the great creations of some God greater than I, that I would converse with thee. To the inhabitants of my kingdom, I am supreme ruler of the universe, and it is well; but there was a beginning to my existence. Although thirty-five centuries have rolled by and found me queen, yet the earth and the sun were made and I found the elements were before me. I recognize a being infinite, a creator

of all things, and to that divine power I bow and pay tribute in secret."

I made answer to the queen :

"It is that supreme God I worship."

"Sayest thou so, mine Angelo? Doth the traditions of thy religion tell how that this great Creator made the world and conceived the plans of the universe, illimitable as space? How he made man in his own image and concentrated all the wisdom of His practice in that most perfect of his handiwork—woman? Tell me, stranger, doth thy religion teach thee this?"

"Thou hast said."

"Then change not thy beliefs for thou dost worship the father of immortality, and I only ask thy devotion, being one of his children. Has he sent no queen to rule over thy country as I have charge over the souls on this island?"

"Diana," I answered, "He did send His son to that land which lies beyond thy kingdom, but they murdered him. He rose from the

tomb, and ascended into paradise where He still pleads with the Creator for the souls of men, and they who hearken to the words He spake while on earth may find rest in the bright land beyond the stars."

Diana arose from the couch and walked about the chamber. I saw that she was striving to subdue some deep passion which had taken possession of her, but when she returned, she seemed not to have been disturbed, and said:

"Let us speak no more tonight of that divine being they murdered; only tell me, Angelo, it was thy sex who insulted the gods that I may know the women of thy country ever love and are tender."

"History records not the name of any female, but loved and showed him devotion," I answered.

"And was this son of the infinite God born upon earth of earthly parents?"

"So it is recorded, my queen."

“It must be that He has found means of passing the angel who guards Eden’s gates, and has partaken of the fruit of the tree of life. My stranger guest, it is over thirty-five centuries since I landed upon this island, an infant in the arms of my mother, driven hither by adverse winds. I remember nothing of that perilous journey, nor the cause of our sailing on the great sea, for my parents died before I had arrived at the age of understanding, and not one of the company with us ever took interest enough in me to converse about it.

“The only legacy my father left me was the large scroll thou seest by the throne. The first eight years of my life were spent in destitution and misery, living by the alms of an indifferent people, seeking shelter from the dews under some scraggy shrub, and hiding from the rains beneath the ledge of some rock, for the island was then wild and rugged. In the ninth year of my unfortunate existence, a wise old seer, whom all the people called Rabbi, suddenly

conceived an interest in me, and taking me one day upon his knee spake these words, which I have ever treasured :

“ ‘ Little daughter, thou art fatherless, homeless, unfortunate and miserable. I have suffered none of the men to give thee aught save bread for the bare preservation of thy life, for I have in store for thee great things, and it was necessary to school thee in misery.’

“ Then he brought from his tent a large scroll like unto the one thou seest before thee, and read therefrom how that a great Creator had made the world and the fullness thereof, and how He had made man and woman and placed them in the beautiful garden where they had dominion over all living things upon the earth ; how that the women ate of a fruit which she was forbidden by the God to touch, and in consequence she and the man were driven from the garden, and an angel with a sword of fire guarded the entrance, lest they should return and partake of the tree of

life and become immortal Gods. Many days he read to me, never commenting on this wondrous story of creation and sin, but one day he told me to come to him again after I had seen the new moon twelve times and make a request which he would grant were it in his power. In the meantime he taught me to read the characters in the scroll, and then the time allotted for study was expired and I came before him to name my wish, I was neither ignorant nor miserable, for the rabbi had taught me a knowledge possessed in that age by none of my sex.

“ ‘ Rabbi,’ I said one morning, ‘ the time is at hand for thee to hear my prayer ; thou rememberst ? ’

“ ‘ Yea, my daughter,’ he replied, ‘ the seer hath not forgotten ; say on. ’ ”

“ Can Angelo conjecture my petition ? ”

“ I know not how to answer thee,” I replied. “ God once commanded a great king to choose what he would have ; great riches, victory over his enemies or wisdom, and he chose wisdom

that he might rule his people with justice and mercy. But thou art a woman, Diana, and I cannot answer thee unless thou didst request perpetual life and the beauty of the immortal gods."

"Thou hast guessed my desire in part, although I thought not of beauty." I said to the rabbi :

" 'My father, I would have power to pass the angel who stands guard by Eden's gate and partake of the tree of life.'

" 'Daughter,' the rabbi made answer, 'daughter, thy prayer can only be granted thee by unceasing toil on thy part, but if thou wouldst make the trial I will aid thee so far as it lieth in my power.'

" I cried eagerly :

" 'Speak that which I must do, for I have ever known privation, and misery has been my companion all my life. I fear not the dangers which beset my path ; only instruct thy pupil that she may depart on her journey.'

“ ‘My child,’ said the rabbi, ‘I bless thee that thou art ready to undertake a task which may regain that which the first mother lost through disobedience. Break no law of nature, and commit not even in thought, the sin which drove our parents from the garden.’

“ When he had spoken these words he returned unto his tent and the next day they carried him to the dark river.

“ For the second time in life I found myself without a friend, but I cared not for the friendship of these people so long as I could procure from the trees and vines sufficient food on which to live. So without assistance from a living man I started on my journey, with only the advice of the good rabbi for my guide. I think, mine Angelo, thou wilt appreciate how difficult it was for one of my age to fully comprehend the meaning of that advice, and in ignorance of its full purport, how impossible it would be to follow. For days together I read the characters in the scroll and pondered on their in-

tent. First I noticed in the sacred writings that our primitive parents, prior to the time the supreme God drove them forth from the garden, used for food only the fruits which grew therein, and I concluded, after much thought, that the Creator intended man not to eat of the flesh of animals.

“It was not difficult for me to follow the example of our first parents in this respect, for I had not tasted meat in all my life. At the age of twelve I had decided to my satisfaction what nature intended for her children, and being ever careful not to disobey the least of her laws, I began to ponder on the second portion of the seer’s advice. I say to you, my guest, that I nearly gave up the attempt to find the tree of life.

“If this Eden was a material garden upon the earth, it was very evident it was not planted upon this wild island, every foot of which I knew, while to reach the great world beyond the boundless ocean was a task I deemed im-

possible. Even could I have found this Eden and been able to pass by the angel, how should I distinguish the tree of life from that other which lost for our first parents the blessings of immortality. Seasons came and passed, and I grew from childhood to womanhood, but I seemed no nearer the goal than when I first started, until one night a bright being stood before me in my dream and said :

“ ‘ Diana, the gods have noted how patiently thou has striven to attain the object of thy search, and they have sent me hither to aid thee in thy task. Know, thou child of earth, that the tree of knowledge and the tree of life stand not in the midst of the garden in the material sense, as thou thinkest. If thou dost sin against nature by remaining awake all through the darkness, thou art made aware of thine error by the heaviness of thine eyelids. Read again from the scroll and learn.’

“ On the morrow I searched eagerly through the characters on the parchment to learn the

meaning of the angel's words, but it was many days before the light broke and I saw that to partake of the forbidden fruit was to experience in thought or deed, a passionate love."

"And didst thou find the tree of life?" I asked eagerly.

"The end of my story is not far distant; be patient and thou shalt judge for thyself. Ever shunning what I believed to be the dreaded tree, and watching ever lest I should break nature's commands, I lived on and though children were born upon the island, and grew to be men and women—grew old and departed on that mysterious journey—I lived ever in the spring-time of life. As I grew older in years the beauty of my youth seemed only to deepen, and the children of these people who despised me in mine infancy because I was helpless, revered and worshiped me until I found the religion of the old rabbi was forgotten, and I declared myself their queen and keeper of the souls of men. Thou seest, Angelo, how that I

have changed a desolate island into a paradise and have built this palace to mine immortal glory. I have counted the years of my reign, and they are three thousand five hundred and two, and so I would ask thee, fair stranger, if thou dost think I have partaken of the tree of life and become a child of the infinite God."

"O, queen," I cried, "I no longer doubt thine immortality and henceforth will I pour out my spirit in prayer to thee."

"Arise, Angelo, nor change thy religion. I but ask thy friendship. Alas! it is not given me to know if I have ever attained that which I did seek from childhood, and it may be that I wander amongst the trees of that garden shunning alike the forbidden fruit and the tree of life, because I cannot distinguish the difference. I am ever watchful lest the serpent steal in and beguile me."

"It must be, O, queen, that thou hast found the secret of perpetual life, else how could the centuries roll by and find thee young and

beautiful. For ages have the inhabitants of my country sought this fountain that they might bathe in its waters and grow young; but they ever seek a stream of bright water bubbling from the earth, or a river of fire rolling along beneath its surface while they dissipate the youthfulness of the soul with blinded passion and pleasing lust."

Diana smiled.

"I fear the men of thy land have yet to learn that great blessings can only be found at the end of a long and painful journey, and ever seek to reward the heart by the performance of tasks that are carnal and concern not the soul. But I must bid thee good night, for my eyelids grow weary and I would sleep."

I left the queen and sought my tent, but not to sleep. Lying on the rich rug, I saw in the moonlight the jeweled sentence above the entrance of the palace, and the brilliant reflection burned into my soul the truthfulness of what it so boldly asserted.

CHAPTER VI.

“Here ye! here ye! servants of the queen,” came the voice of the favored Alleman on the pure morning air and awoke me out of a sound slumber. Sharp and malicious sounded his words, and I detected a dislike for the duty he was performing. Poor Alleman, he had never been able to foregive me that my tent had been pitched where the shadow of the palace fell upon it.

“Here ye! here ye!” floated to me again, faintly and from the direction of the village, and I arose from my rug and went to the door. The natives had begun to pour out of their dwellings, and gathered in groups about Alleman as if to inquire the occasion for their being disturbed at that early hour, for the inhabitants toiled but little, and the sun was high when they welcomed him, unless the queen’s command disturbed them. While I stood

pondering on the cause of this early summons, there suddenly appeared before me, as if he had risen out of the ground, my friend Mullane, pale and agitated.

"Mullane," I inquired, "what has happened to thee? Thou art white as any corpse thou didst ever carry down the gloomy way to the river. Tell me what hast befallen thee."

"O, mighty man, hast thou informed the queen that my love lies sleeping by the river?"

"Nay, Mullane," I answered him, "I have said nothing; why dost thou inquire?"

"Because the queen commands the presence of her children, and this is no fete day," he replied.

"But thou hast Diana's promise," that thou shalt live in paradise with the bright spirit thou dost love. Fearest thou the queen will break her covenant with thee?"

"Nay, wise stranger, I shall dwell in the bright land beyond the stars, but I fear me the maiden's spirit may have formed other ties in

that glorious paradise. Thinkest thou, O, Angelo, she has forgotten the poor wretch who has dared to disobey the queen because of his love for her?"

"No, Mullane, she has not forgotten; there is no fickleness in paradise. And the bright spirit of her who lies sleeping so peacefully by the river awaits anxiously thy coming."

When I said this the enslaved features of Mullane brightened, and he fell down and kissed my sandals before I could prevent him.

"O, stranger," he cried, "Diana is my queen, but thou art my comforter."

"What sayest thou, Mullane?" came in sweet accents from behind us, and turning quickly about I saw standing before me the beautiful Princess Vesta.

"Mullane," she said, "Diana is a jealous queen, and if thou wilt worship the stranger god it were well for thee that thy sovereign's eye fall not on thy devotions."

I thought to see Mullane stand abashed be-

fore the princess or fall upon his face and plead for mercy, and was no little surprised, when, after kissing her sandal, he arose and said :

“O, my princess, thou knowest I worship none save the queen and her household, but Angelo hath done me a great kindness, and I am sure neither the immortal queen, nor thou, my princess, would have me slow in gratitude.”

“I know thou art a loyal subject, and I am glad to see thee revere our guest; thou mayest go.”

Mullane fell upon his face before her, and then departed, less pale and agitated than when he appeared before me an hour previous.

The countenance of Vesta shone with a radiant beauty.

“Angelo,” she said, “I am come from Diana with commands which give me great joy, for they bring to thee an honor never bestowed on mortal man. Little did I think when I found thee upon our shores, thou shouldst win such favor with the queen.”

I answered her wonderingly :

“ My fair Vesta, the queen has already shown me greater favor than I deserve, and I can conceive no fairer honor than to be permitted to pass the portals of the palace.”

“ That was a privilege which seemed to honor thee only because it was unusual for the queen to so indulge thy sex,” replied Vesta. “ See, Angelo ! I have brought thee a new robe, a present from Diana, who commands thee to wear it this day when thy station shall be advanced in the presence of her subjects. I leave thee now, but will come again when the sun hath traveled a fourth of his journey.”

I went into my tent to examine this new acquisition to my wardrobe. I found it to be a robe even richer in texture than the one Vesta had given me on the day she presented me to the immortal queen, and enriched by a necklace and girdle, studded with precious gems. Looking closely at the girdle, I found on the buckle, finely engraved, “ From Vesta.” With

deep reverence I lifted the jeweled belt to my lips and kissed again the name of this princess who had won my heart and who yet held me aloof by her greatness, the knowledge of which drove me almost to despair. But man will ever hope, and sitting there within the shadow of my tent, I indulged myself in those wild fancies which are ever present in the mind of youth, and dreamed of a possible day when the vast gulf which separated an immortal princess and a poor castaway, might be drunk up by the fires of a passionate love, or be swollen beyond its bounds by tears of pity until its waters would catch us both and bear us together on its current.

Not the imperial look of Diana, not the dark eyes of Melpomene that carried the dreams of poesy in every gleam, nor the laughing countenance of Thalia filled me with such feelings of love and reverence as did the sweet smile of Vesta, from whose eyes shone only the soul of a mortal richly filled with sympathy for its fel-

low. I could scarce bring myself to think of her as an inmate of the palace of perpetual life, so sweet, so homelike was she, and as I gazed on this engraved token of love, so like unto the fancies of my country's maidens, I dared dream of a day when Vesta should be my own. The presumption was the more excusable in me on account of my rapid advancement in the queen's favor, and even now, looking back upon these scenes through the wisdom of my many years, I cannot condemn my youth from pirating from a tempting future.

Lying there, with the sun's rays stealing in at the door and changing the border of my rug into gold, I reviewed my two months' life in this strange land, and found nothing to regret. It had been just one month since I had walked awed and frightened into the palace, and now not only did I not fear that I was being preserved to be the victim of some future orgies, but I was actually schooling myself into the belief that I might one day become a per-

manent resident in this great palace and form an alliance with its immortality.

The mind of youth ever yearns for things beyond its reach, and while I sat waiting the day's events, I rehearsed the day dreams I had had when but a lad of twelve, and was surprised to recall that my favorite dream then was strangely like what had actually happened to me on this Isle of Feminine. There was the same palace, except that the palace of my dream was built of gray stone with a tower whose summit reached far toward the skies; and there was the beautiful female, but how unlike Diana, for my childhood's queen thought not much of the mysterious things which lie beyond this mundane sphere, nor sought to become immortal through the agency of that mysterious tree which history or tradition places beyond the reach of man. But my charming queen lived sweetly on, young and beautiful in her simple life. My dream had become a reality, had she grown old, or kept her youth by effort.

The air castles of childhood never tumble, but rise higher and higher until they reach the child's paradise, then they relax their grasp and lay the foundation for another castle.

In reaching this island of my youthful imagination I passed not through all the dangers and privations I have lately experienced, for a child's fiction entangles him not in dark and intricate meshes, and then, just as his soul cries out in despair lifts him up and bears him on to the happiness he has been striving to attain. I only went to sleep in my own cozy bed, and when the sun peeped into my window next morning, found that the great ocean had been crossed while I slept, and that I stood quite happy in the presence of my little queen. While I weeded the bed of spring vegetables for my mother, I was winning the affections of my laughing little queen, and an errand to the corner grocery was but a long stroll by her side through the shady groves which surrounded her castle. And at length, when we had been

long together, I began to think seriously of making her my wife, and one hot Sunday morning as I sat in the carriage by my mother's side, on our way to the old brick church, I found that this beautiful maiden loved me, so we solemnly declared ourselves to be man and wife, for there were no ministers on my island, and forever then we were very happy, until at least my father and mother came in a bog, ship and we returned with them to my own home.

So I had laid the last stone on the turret of my castle and if the stones happened to be all bubbles and burst, they had floated far out of sight before the catastrophe, and no knowledge of the ruin ever reached me.

In the midst of all these thoughts of the past and dreams of the future, I caught sight of the jeweled robe lying before me, and I hastened to put it on, remembering the command of Vesta. I had hardly completed the task when the princess appeared at the doorway.

"Come, Angelo, the queen awaits thee," she said.

"Tell me, sweet princess," I entreated, what new honor the queen will bestow upon me, that I may study how to answer her with becoming grace."

"Nay, thou shalt wait and see, and if the gratitude of thy heart fills not thy mouth with befitting speech, thy silence will be forgiven. Come!"

By the side of Vesta I walked out of my tent, the thousand jewels of my robe glittering in the sunlight as we passed along; and I saw before the palace the chair of state with its awning of gold cloth. The queen was there and her household. In a semi-circle on her right stood the maidens of the village, while on the left, with their enslaved faces bowed to the earth, were the males from the favored Alleman, his face white with rage and envy, to the lowly Mullane, whose joyful smile told me that I had at least one friend in all

that multitude. I mentally resolved to do him some great kindness.

I stood before the queen, the Princess Vesta by my side, with her countenance bathed in radiant smiles.

"O, my mother, she began," I have brought to thee our stranger guest, Angelo, the messenger from that land which lies beyond the shores of thy kingdom, where thy brother rules over the souls of men. It was I who found and cared for him while he rested from his long journey, and to me belongs his life, for I have saved it.

"We recognize thy right to the stranger," answered Diana. "Speak thy desire."

"I would, O, queen," said Vesta; "I would consecrate his life to thy service."

"And what sayeth our guest?" questioned the queen. "Will he renounce allegiance to his own land to become the son and subject of Diana?"

My temples throbbed, and I could almost hear

the beating of my heart, as the wild thoughts rushed through my brain: Give up that country whose laws were dear to me? declare myself an alien to the home of my father and my mother? I could not, and yet, what other course was left me? I saw no possibility of ever again beholding all those dear ones, and since I must remain on the island, why not conform to its laws? And then too, the queen had said naught of my religion, and I would in the end reach that same heaven where my mother would wait for me. So I answered:

“My queen, that country which lies far distant is very dear to me, even as is thy love to thy subjects, but I may never again see its shores, and I renounce allegiance to its laws, and bow to Vesta’s desire and thy will.”

“Angelo, thou sayest well. Hear ye, my children and my household, the will of Diana concerning the stranger. Angelo, I declare thee first prince of the house of Diana, brother to the Princess Vesta, and keeper of the great

seal. Henceforth thou shalt be sacred in the eyes of my subjects and death lieth in the path of him who would do thee any harm. Thou shalt have a chamber in the palace, and in matters concerning the government of mine earthly kingdom, thou shalt be the spokesman. I have said."

Then Vesta received from the queen's hand a band of pure gold, which she placed upon my head, and all the people cried, "Great and wise is the immortal queen;" and again I heard them shout, "Honored and sacred is the Prince Angelo, keeper of the great seal," but it came to me as the whisper of a dream, so strangely did it sound. It all came about so suddenly I had not yet been able to realize my transportation from the humble dreams of Andrew Lowe to a nation's applause of a newly-made Prince Angelo; yet with the true instinct of man, before I could understand or appreciate my newly-acquired honors, I longed to learn whether the queen's favors carried along with

them the perpetual life enjoyed by my sisters in royalty. Although I dared not so hope, I determined to learn the truth from Vesta at the first opportunity. My soul suddenly burned with a desire to fight my way past the angel with the flaming sword and seek the tree of life in the midst of the garden.

When the inhabitants had all departed and I stood alone before the queen and her household, I felt for the first time how unworthy I was to belong to that noble house whose queen looked down on me from the loftiness of her thirty-five centuries, and how insignificant I must appear to her. And I would have burst into a flood of tears had it not been that I feared the merry derision of sixteen laughing eyes. My countenance must have betrayed somewhat of my heart's intent, for the queen questioned me concerning the cause of my sadness.

"O, queen," I answered her, "I am miserable, because I stand on the verge of a yawn-

ing gulf which separates mine ignorance from the wisdom of thine house."

"Grieve not for that, Prince Angelo, for that same gulf thou seest stretch darkly before thee, once spread itself before the eyes of thy queen, and even now I stand above its threatening depths just far enough across to see dimly the bright land which lies beyond. And my maidens come after me, each far behind the other. My Princess Vesta has but started on the journey, and it may be she will tarry for thee, if thou wilt but travel fast and not grow faint. The gloomy abyss thou seest, my prince, is ignorance, and each plank thou layest on the bridge which thou wilt build for thy crossing, shall be called experience. Only make sure each timber is solid, and all will be well. But we will speak more of this hereafter. Now we will leave thee to walk and converse with thy new sister." Saying this, the queen and all the others departed, leaving Vesta and myself entirely alone.

"Where wouldst thou walk, Prince Angelo?" after a long pause, during which I was much embarrassed.

"Nay, I am thy brother now, and I would have thee call me Angelo," I answered.

"May I not call thee brother?"

"If thou wilt be so kind," I replied.

"Then, my brother, whither shall we go?"

"Let us to the great palm which first sheltered me on this lovely island, and where I awoke to behold thine eyes and the dawning of the day at one glance, where the little stream runs babbling by and loses itself in the great sea. And as we walk, my Vesta, pray tell me the queen's intentions concerning me."

"I know not, my brother, what further advancement the queen intends for thee. Thou art already prince of the house of perpetual life; doth my Angelo so soon sigh for new honors?"

"O, Vesta," I answered, stung by her ques-

tion, because it touched so nearly the thought of my heart. "O, Vesta, thou knowest I meant not that, but I understood not all the queen's sayings. Thinkest thou she means to give me perpetual life?"

"I know not," replied Vesta. "Would it please thee to forget all thy passions and perpetually live in coldness and indifference?"

I looked into Vesta's eyes, while I answered her:

"My sweet sister, since it is impossible that I should ever possess the only thing I ever loved, I am willing, nay eager to forego all the infirmities of man and become a student of Diana."

Vesta sighed:

"I pity thee, Angelo, that the vast waters separate thee from thy love."

We had reached the palm and stood beneath its rich foliage.

"O, sister," I cried, "an obstacle greater than the ocean separates me from my heart's

desire. We are divided by a caste which it is impossible to overcome. Here on this island dwells my love."

Vesta looked at me pityingly, and I thought there was disappointment in her voice when she answered :

"I did not know thou wert made captive by one of the maidens of this island. Why didst thou not tell me, for not indeed I fear the loftiness of thy position makes thy dream impossible."

"Vesta, Vesta!" I plead, throwing myself at her feet, "thou wilt drive me mad. Have pity and do not loathe me, for it is thou who hast stolen my heart."

I can see even yet that look of surprise and fear, as Vesta retreated from me.

"Angelo, Angelo!" she almost shrieked, "recall those dreadful words. Knowest thou not the great secret of perpetual life is the total absence of passionate love between the sexes?"

Forget what thou hast said, dear brother. Let us return to the palace, and O, my prince, be careful that the queen form no acquaintance with thy feelings."

CHAPTER VII.

O, the swelling pride, the sweet hope, the miserable despair that filled my life for the first days after I had been created prince of the realm. "If only my parents and my friends were here to share with me my new honors," I thought. I would have been willing to sacrifice all the glories of my advancement to hear my precious mother say proudly :

"To be sure, Andrew, thou wert never a handsome lad, but the honesty that shines from thine eyes has acquainted the queen of thy great worth."

Dear old mother ; I never saw her again, but the distance between us is growing less each day, and she stands waiting for me at the end of my journey. I pray the good God I may be able to say :

"Dear, my mother, that uprightness which thou didst instil into my youth and of which

thou wert so proud—even those early lessons have brought me here.”

I am proud to recall that the first hours after the magnificent palace had been made my home were spent in thinking of my mother. When the angry waves were tossing me about I had suffered no agony she would not gladly have shared or taken entirely to herself, and I am joyed to remember that in the loftiest moments of my life I wished that my mother had been present to share with me.

It were difficult to relate how my hopes soared out beyond my reach as I reclined in my apartment, dreaming of the difficulties I should meet and conquer, of the planks I should place in the bridge which I must build and cross, and now that my toil should never cease until I had overtaken, not only Vesta, but the queen.

As on the morning I stepped proudly from beneath the college roof with my diploma under my arm, so now I felt ready for any foe

that might present, yet was I not equipped for any of the realities of life, because none of those planks, which the queen was pleased to call experience, had been hewn. But was I not already first man of the kingdom, and had not the queen entrusted me with the great seal, and instructed her subjects to do me reverence? Altogether, there was no reason why I should not be happy and hope—save one.

The heart of man longs for the unattainable.

From the day I first saw and loved Vesta, I knew how foolish it was for me to cultivate a passion for an immortal princess, yet I ever hoped the queen might advance my condition, and on the day, even the hour of my great triumph, I found my heart crying out against the desire which filled my life with the ineffable sweetness of anticipation; I struck out on the broad waves to find something more tangible than hope, and my bark was caught in the vortex of despair. Oh, how my soul prayed to the queen to recall the illustrious title of prince

and give me Vesta's love in compensation, to take back the great seal and in turn rescue my drowning hope, to exchange the sweet name of sister for that title dearest to the heart of man. What could it profit me to be prince of the whole world and have not Vesta, and she had told me with her own lips how impossible were my longings.

The jeweled furnishings of my room looked dull and heavy and the sweet strains of music, floating from the queen's apartment fell upon my soul like the croaking of some ominous bird. Every man is indeed happy who escapes that one time in his existence when the heart, groaning under the agonies of disappointed love, flies from the notes of enchanting song.

To add to the intensity of my despair, I was seized with a great fear that Vesta might consider me unsafe to longer remain a member of the royal family and betray to Diana the rebellion of my heart against her most sacred law touching the safety of her household ;

for had I not laid bare before the queen's favorite child that passion which had wrecked the human heart since its first pulsation, and that with the most thorough knowledge of the harm it had worked in the world, and the thick wall Diana had built about her children to shield them from its blighting influence? I even wrought upon my mind to the point of believing myself the duplicate of, or even the original serpent, that with his wiles played upon the credulity of the unsuspecting Eve and seduced the innocence of her being to the eternal sorrow of her sex.

In the midst of these perplexities and fears, this consciousness of wrong which made me loathe myself, I recalled my mental promise to befriend Mullane, and quitted the palace to seek him out.

In choosing a gift for Mullane, I sought to favor him with the thing I myself would most likely desire were I he—more light in the dim cavern of death to shine upon the face of my

beautiful sleeping love. I found the poor slave lying under a tree near the village. When he saw me, he came running forward and fell upon his face.

"O, mighty prince," he cried, "now I can worship thee without fear, and I can pray more freely to thee that thou knowest the secrets of my heart."

"Rise, Mullane," I answered, and I recall with what a kingly, condescending air I said it, so soon does man accustom himself to the pleasing robes of authority. "Rise, Mullane, and accompany me toward the sea, for I have something to say to thee concerning that secret of thy heart of which thou didst speak. Tell me, if I did promise to fulfill one desire of thy soul, what wouldst thou ask?"

"O, prince, I have but one desire in my life, but I fear to name it to thee, lest thou shouldst think me unreasonable."

"Speak on," I commanded.

"Thou knowest the light in the cavern

where sleeps my love is dim, and I scarce can see her face."

"And thou wouldst have me command the sun to penetrate a thousand feet of rock, and shed its rays upon thy sleeping beauty?"

"Thy slave does not hope so great a blessing."

"Or," I continued, "perhaps the soft beams of the full moon would serve thy purpose?"

"That would bring the greatest joy of my life," answered the unsuspecting slave. "But —"

"But thou dost doubt my power," I said, interrupting him.

"Nay, Prince Angelo, I know thou hast the power."

"Yea, Mullane, I have power to command the sun," I answered boldly, and had he dared to look upon the face of his superior, he might have seen the deep flush which overspread my countenance at the lie I uttered. "But were I to command the sun to send such

force as would serve thy purpose, the great heat would scorch up the green leaves, and the fragrant flowers would droop and die."

"I see the folly of my desire, and I pray thou wilt not remember it against thy servant," pleaded Mullane.

"Thou shalt see the beautiful maiden," I replied. "Run to thine house and bring with thee some vessel."

There had not been fire on the island for three thousand years, so the queen informed me, and she alone held the secret of creating it. I had determined to surprise Mullane with a little blaze and place in his possession the means of lighting the cavern. He soon caught up with me, bearing a vessel, and we journeyed on toward the beach farthest from the palace. When we had gone some distance we came to a wood with foliage so dense the sun never penetrated it, and I saw all about us slender frames placed about two feet from the ground. Some of these frames held a material which

seemed as rich and white as the robe I wore, and others but a thin web, while over all crawled great bugs resembling a spider, except that they were much larger. Greatly astonished, I asked Mullane what they were.

"Surely thou knowest, Prince Angelo," he answered me.

"Yet answer me as though I knew nothing."

"Those are the weavers making cloth for the immortal queen and her royal house. They weave continually and we have but to take the cloth when it is finished and fashion it into robes. Farther on the cloth is made for the queen's subjects. Diana taught them to weave in the beginning, but now each teaches her offspring."

"I see thou art well informed. Let us continue our journey," I said, with seeming indifference, but many times I turned my head to look at these lowly toilers, and I marveled that the Creator, in His infinite wisdom, had

not placed them in all parts of the earth to take the place of those human slaves who spin and sew under the oppressive hand of insolence and wealth, and who exchange each day a drop of their heart's blood for a morsel of bread.

"Mullane," I said, as we neared the beach, "I am going to do for thee that which might not find favor with the queen did she notice it, hence thou must not disclose to any one what I will show thee. Surely the immortal Diana will know everything we do, but as long as she is not reminded of it, she will choose to overlook."

"I vow by great Diana's power," he began, when I interrupted him.

"Vow not at all. I will believe thy simple word as readily as an oath. Hast thou ever seen fire?"

"I understand not thy strange words, Prince Angelo," he answered, a puzzled look on his homely face.

"It is an element creating light and heat,"

I ventured. At my explanation his countenance brightened.

"I have seen the sun," he said. His answer pleased me.

"Thou art quick to comprehend, and I intend to make for thee a little sun which thou mayest carry into the cavern to light up the face of her who lies sleeping.

Mullane was overwhelmed with joy. "O, prince," he cried, "Thou art wise and omnipotent, even as Diana, and thou art considerate of thy slaves. How can I make myself worthy of so great a kindness? Thou wilt sink into the hearts of thy subjects deep as Vesta's love."

"She is my sister," I said, with proud boyish confidence, entirely forgetful that I was a great prince speaking to his slave. When we reached the shore Mullane gathered some dry twigs and leaves, and with two sticks of hard wood, I caused the first smoke he had ever seen curl toward heaven. This astonished him greatly, but when the little tongues of flame

began to leap up, the amazement written on his features was something ludicrous to see.

"What is the matter?" I asked, laughing, that a man should be astonished out of his senses at sight of a slight fire such as the smallest boy in our country delights in creating if he can pilfer matches and escape the vigilant eye of his mother. But each country to its own habits and oddities, and I had but to remember the dense wood and the weavers to cease my mirth.

"Now, Mullane, if thou wilt catch a quantity of small fish that crowd upon the beach as if they were trying to escape some enemy, we will begin our labor." The herring rushed upon the beach in such numbers that it was not difficult to secure what I required, and when the sun was low we covered the burning twigs with sand, and started homeward with a quantity of oil in a small jar he had brought with him.

"Take the oil to thine house, Mullane, and tomorrow we will make the lamp," I said.

As we walked leisurely along towards the palace, the sun sank out of sight and the half-full moon turned the leaves to silver as they rustled above us. Certainly the Isle of Feminine was a fit kingdom for an immortal queen. Lost in the beauties of my surroundings I sat down by the wayside to dream, forgetful of my companion who moved away a respectful distance and threw himself upon the ground. And my dream was the dream of youth, a dream of love, and doubts, and hope—of the beautiful Vesta I might not win, yet worshiped with such unselfish devotion I would have died for her willingly. If only she were here now, I thought, she would find love so akin to perfect night she could not resist. But Vesta was not there. No doubt she is praying for me in the palace if she ever prays, whispered the egotism of my youth.

There was a bright flash before my eyes that startled me, and I threw up my arm as if to ward off a blow from an unseen hand, but it

found nothing to resist. I heard a scream of terror pierce the night air, a sound that fell coldly upon my soul as it died away. Everything was confusion. I arose bewildered. Mullane was embracing my knees and crying joyfully that I was saved. What did it all mean? I looked about me—Ah, God, have pity! there stood Vesta, a keen knife in her hand and a mad fury contorting her face that was terrible to behold. And I had been dreaming of love—of Vesta. Before I could find words to give utterance to the horror I felt, I discovered an object crouching at her side, and the pale moonbeams showed me the pitiful, pleading, ashen face of Alleman; the child had saved me from the hatred of the father. I could only cry, “O, Vesta!” and sinking upon the ground I covered my face with my hands and wept.

“Thou art not hurt, Prince Angelo?” came tremblingly from her lips.

“O, my princess,” I cried, “twice hast thou saved my life; henceforth, I shall be thy slave.”

"Peace, prince. Now is my soul too sad to hear of sentiment." Turning to Alleman, she said sadly :

"O, thou whom I have called father, darkly lies thy doom before thee. Didst thou not hear Diana's words concerning the prince?"

"Child! child!" moaned Alleman, "thou wilt not sacrifice me for the stranger? Have mercy, O daughter of my lost wife!"

"I cannot save thee from the queen's vengeance; thou hast sinned against Diana and the heavens. Let us to the palace, and O, as thou art my sire, torture not my soul with vain pleadings."

"Surely, Vesta," I faltered, "thou wilt not accuse good Alleman before the queen?"

"Thou too, prince? Hast thou forgotten thou art a member of the royal house? Come!"

I could say no more, but with Mullane followed sadly after this child leading her parent to his death, sacrificing love to a duty that could never waver.

As we neared the palace, we heard the music of the dance.

"The maidens amuse the queen," said Vesta sadly.

"Slowly we wended our way before the queen, who saw in the deep gloom which overcast our little party, that something terrible and unusual had occurred. The dancers stood motionless, and the music died away in weird sigh; many were the faces which grew ashen under that oppressive quiet.

The queen looked at us all as if she would read our hearts, then, turning to Vesta, commanded her to relate the cause of our sorrowful demeanor.

"Thou, O queen, who can read the hearts of men, spare me the agony of speech," pleaded Vesta.

"Dread, queen," cried Alleman, springing forward and groveling at her feet; "Spare me! spare me! I am the father of thy Princess

Vesta. I have given all my life in servitutde to thine immortal greatness. Have pity!"

"What grievous thing hast thou done to cry for mercy?" asked Diana, but in answer Alleman only rent the air with his shrieks to be spared.

"My subjects, gather about the queen's household," commanded Diana, and they formed a semi-circle about us. "Some terrible thing has happened to disturb our pleasure." My princesses, give ear to what is spoken, for thou shalt sit with me in judgment. "Prince Angelo," she continued, turning to me, "Tell me what has happened?"

I was suffocating and the words choked me as they came from my throat: "I saw nothing but a bright gleam before mine eyes as I sat by the wayside."

"And thou, Mullane?"

"I heard only confusion and a maiden's cry, and I saw the Princess Vesta towering above the writhing form of the favored Alleman."

"Aught else?" inquired the queen.

"Nothing, as I hope to reach the bright land beyond the stars."

Touching pity shown from the eyes of Diana as she looked on Vesta.

"Thou art an immortal princess," she said.

"I have not forgotten."

"Speak," commanded the queen.

"O, my sire, thou hast seared the brightness of my life and the child's heart breaks that the princess must accuse thee before the queen." I turned my face that I might not see her agony. After a pause, during which her heart must have been rent to obtain a mastery over love, she continued:

"My queen, thy servant Alleman attempted the life of Prince Angelo, but happily I approached in time to stay his hand."

A cry of horror went up from the inhabitants as they heard and the princesses looked silently into each others' faces.

"My royal children, thou hast heard," said

Diana. "Melpomene, what sentence shall be meted out to Alleman?"

"He shall die," came in solemn answer.

"He shall die," repeated each princess in turn along the line until it came Vesta's time to speak. I could not think the queen would expect the child to pass sentence on her father.

Vesta remained motionless and uttered no sound.

"I have seven daughtes in my royal family," said the queen, and the tortured soul of Vesta answered:

"He shall die."

Then the queen spoke to Alleman:

"Hear thy doom, O, slave to passion. This night thy soul shall take its flight to the land of eternal darkness, and thy body shall find no rest upont the current of the dark rolling stream, but shall feed the fishes of the sea. I have said."

I looked upon Alleman. He lay upon the ground, his face still and white. He was dead.

Even as the queen spoke, his spirit took its flight. Silently they carried his body to the sea and cast it to the waves, and the inhabitants fell upon their faces and cried:

“Great is the will of Diana.”

CHAPTER VIII.

For days alter the death of Alleman a deep gloom hung over the inhabitants, and the cheerfulness of the royal household was much diminished. Five days did Vesta remain in the palace to mourn the death of her father, and when she appeared again among us the bright smile had fled from her eyes, and in place a sadness sweet and gentle had stolen.

Pure, loving Vesta; the world shall never see her like again. The guilelessness of her life needed not the prestige of eternal royalty to make her blest.

Oft we walked together towards the sea when the sun was low, or strolled side by side down the shaded avenues at noontide, my poor starved soul drinking eagerly her words of wisdom and rich intonation, or we sat together in some shady place where the violets scented the air with their fragrance. And the mad

passion of my youth departed, and there came instead that grander passion—a love so divine it could not offend nor terrify my sister princess. Unperceived, the affinity of our souls grew stronger each day until a love, harmless and holy, bound together our hearts.

In these days, too, I found myself much in company with the queen, who ever sought more knowledge of him she called brother—that son of the infinite God; and when I told her how he had come to rule the world with love, and left violence to the ungodly, Diana would sigh. Once she surprised me by asking if I thought her subjects could be ruled by love.

“I would be like that glorious prince thou tellest me of, O Angelo,” she said.

And again as we sat one day in the palace, she suddenly interrupted me.

“Prince Angelo,” she began, “I was too severe with poor Alleman, and have brought a great grief upon Vesta, which I would mitigate.

Thinkest thou I might commute his sentence and return him again to the island after three decades?"

"O, my queen," I cried, "that would bring back the gladness to Vesta's countenance."

"But might it not also bring contempt for my commands? The queen cannot lie, and the doom of Alleman has passed my lips."

"Thy brother, O queen, quickened the pulse that had been stilled by the Creator's touch," I answered.

"And I, through love, will recall the doom which rests heavy on the soul of Alleman; when the seasons have changed three hundred times he shall return."

In my joy I caught the queen's hand and kissed it, but I grew cold and trembled when I thought of my boldness, and my eyes plead for forgiveness, for my emotion was so violent I could not speak.

But the queen seemed lost in thought and her hand lay passively in mine.

When Diana dismissed me that day the sun was sinking.

I sought Vesta and found her walking before the palace.

"Joy, my sister," I cried, "for I bring tidings which shall gladden thy heart."

"Nay, prince," she answered sadly, "that can scarcely be, for my happiness is blighted by a bitter grief which I must feel forever."

"Thou dost err, for I can take away that grief. Know, my sister, that the queen has revoked the awful doom which hung over the soul of thy father, and he shall live with us again after the flowers have blossomed three hundred summers."

"Thou art mad with grief, my brother, because thou thinkest thyself the cause of my suffering. Let us try to forget my poor father, and permit not his death to hang heavy upon thy mind, for the sin which cast him out was his own."

"I swear to you by the foundation of the

palace, I speak truly the queen's words," I answered.

The sunshine of happiness shone again from the eyes of my sister, as she heard :

"Now thou art indeed my brother," she said, "for I know it was thy pleading which caused the queen to mitigate my suffering." Saying this, Vesta kissed my forehead, and then ran to pour out the gratitude of her heart unto the queen, leaving me alone with the sweet ecstasies of returning hope.

After the queen's kindness to the soul of Alleman, the dark cloud which had hung over the island passed away, and we all returned to our old happy life.

One day, when I walked down the avenue toward the village, I met Mullane, very much downcast, and I remembered the lamp had been forgotten.

"Cheer up, Mullane," I said to him, "for I have come even now to complete thy joy; the lamp shall be put in order at once."

Mullane answered me sadly :

“Mighty prince, it is not that which weighs heavy upon the heart of thy servant, although I fain would possess the sun thou hast offered me in thy great kindness ; but I see the swimming chariot of the Prince Angelo hidden away among the bushes which droop over the small stream where it empties itself into the sea, and my soul is sad that he shall sail over the wide ocean to dwell among the bright gods of his own land and forget those who love him in the kingdom of Diana.”

“Wouldst thou grieve to see me go, Mullane ? ”

“The spirit of thy slave shall snap as a dry twig on the day of thy departure. O prince, as thou lovest thy sister Vesta, go not from us.”

“How dost thou know I love the princess ? ”
I asked.

“I will tell thee how I know. When the princess walks abroad the beezees are more gentle, and the branches above her head are

silent that they may catch the sound of her breathing. All nature loves Vesta. I cannot tell how it is, but I know the strong ever love the gentle, and I have marked how the countenance of the great Angelo shines more glorious when the fair Vesta approaches. Be not angry with thy servant for the boldness of his speech, nor measure the depth of his love by the poor utterance of his tongue."

"Thou shalt never come to disfavor by fair words of my sister, and fear not Mullane that I shall leave thee ; where the queen and Vesta dwell, thou mayst ever find thy prince. Come ! let us examine this sailing chariot, as thou callest it."

Mullane led me to the stream, and there beneath the bushes which hung over the water lay my boat. I covered my face with my hands that my companion might not notice the tears which ran down my cheeks as the sight of that little craft recalled the sad events of my journey and filled my soul with an inex-

pressible grief. Away from dear ones had that little craft carried me, and in its bottom had I lain helpless while my poor friend let out his life's blood.

"Mullane," I said, when my heart grew calm, "that is the craft which bore me to this island from the bright land beyond the sea. Let us take it from its hiding place and find a mooring where the bushes do not grow."

I got into the boat, and by the aid of a pole pushed it from beneath the undergrowth. When I had found a better landing, with the assistance of Mullane, I drew it upon the sand and turned out the water. I was delighted to find my bark in excellent condition after its rough voyage, and set about immediately to fix a sail to it, thinking of the many pleasant evenings Vesta and I would enjoy in the moonlight, while Mullane guided us through the water.

In the twilight I told the queen of my happy find, and with all her household we went to

the beach to inspect it. Diana marveled much that so frail a thing should be able to stand against the sea, and asked me many questions concerning its guidance in the water. When I had explained everything as best I could, I proposed a sail, and, after much demurring, the queen and Vesta embarked with me and we sped out grandly before the evening breeze, leaving our companions bewildered upon the shore.

The queen was much delighted.

“Couldst thou direct the building of such a craft,” she asked me; “one with greater dimensions so that all my children might embark?”

“My queen, it would be difficult to accomplish, for we have no implements with which to shape the timbers; but if thou dost command I will attempt it.”

“And even did we have the implements, we have not the timbers,” mused the queen.

I suggested the shady trees which grew on either side of the long avenues.

"Nay," replied Diana, "for though I like the gentle motion of thy boat as it glides swiftly over the water, I could not part with the most scraggy tree in my groves—they are my children. But I am glad for thy sake that thou hast found thy craft, for I know it is a joy to thee, and I have ever feared that thou wouldst too soon tire of our small pleasures."

"I shall never lack for enjoyment while I am permitted to remain a member of the royal household," I replied.

We returned in an hour to the landing, the queen and my sister much pleased with the diversion. Each night thereafter, when the moon was full, she looked down upon the white sail and brightened the smiling face of some princess; and in time I taught Mullane to guide the boat while I listened to the musical voice of my sister, or lay entranced by the sweet music of her lute.

I was returning to the palace one morning, after I had fulfilled my long-standing promise

to Mullane to complete his lamp, and had left him eager to descend into the cavern to behold the face of her who ever slept where the cold spray of the dark river fell upon her golden hair. The sun had traveled about two hours of his journey, and the rich foliage glittered as he kissed the leaves with its dazzling beams and bathed them in gold.

All nature seemed in unison with my gladdened heart.

I entered the palace and tempted Vesta forth to walk in the cool shade of the morning while she charmed my ear with the sweet songs of Diana and of Diana's kingdom; how the queen had transformed a rugged island into a paradise of beauty; of her great will, which had conquered all things and won for her control of the universe.

As she related the story of her own life, that she was a little child, following sadly after the pall of her dear mother as they carried her to the dark river, when the queen saw her and

took her under the roof of the palace, from which she emerged only after she had been declared an immortal princess. She spoke sadly of her erring father, and blessed the queen for her great kindness.

Unnoticed we wandered to the palm where first we met in the gray light of the morning. We sat down to rest, and I began to tell Vesta of my home and the dear mother, when Melpomene approached us.

She seemed troubled, and she spoke in a hurried, agitated voice.

"O, Angelo," she said, "hasten to the palace. The queen seems greatly disturbed, and would have audience with thee at once. Tarry not for us, for we will come after thee."

What confused thoughts crowded into my brain as I ran to obey the summons. Without awaiting permission to enter, I rushed into the presence of Diana. She was calm, but I saw she was striving to control some violent emotion.

“Thou art kind, my prince, to respond so quickly to my summons, and I am sorry to have disturbed thy pleasure, but what I have to show thee will brook no delay. Follow me, and I will take thee to the queen’s treasure house.” Saying this, she touched a spring hidden away in the casement, and a trap-door flew open at our feet revealing a flight of stairs, down which I followed her. After descending some twenty steps we came to a large room filled with gold and precious stones. Rich jewels lay in heaps about the apartment and their brightness dazzled me.

When I turned towards the queen her countenance had changed. That imperial look of immortality had vanished, and I saw before me a maiden whose face was flushed with the first passionate emotions of womanhood.

“O, Angelo,” she cried, “thou dost wonder at my great riches? Take them; they are thine. Never again shall their brilliancy give me pleasure, for even now my light flickers and

is going out. I have brought thee hither that these rich jewels may not lie forever hidden in the earth, for not even the Princess Melpomene knows of their existence."

I tried to speak, but Diana interrupted me.

"Nay, listen yet further, my Angelo. I have tried to make thee immortal; I have created thee first prince of the kingdom; the great seal is in thy keeping. Even my favorite child is thy sister. Remember thy title as a passing joy, and treasure the seal as a remembrance of her who spent centuries in vain search for the tree of life, and found it at last through thy teaching; for, O prince, I see the beauteous tree, and it stands majestic near a great white throne. A dark river separates me from it, but a ferryman awaits my coming and my brother stands with outstretched hands on the opposite shore. He shall pluck for me the golden fruit. The infinite God has sent thee to be my guide and I bless thee for thy coming. Rule my people with justice and mercy when I am

no more upon the island, for thou, only, of all my house may live when my power is gone, my sweet daughters shall sink beneath the infirmities of a thousand years, and their spirits shall follow me to the bright land beyond the stars."

"And Vesta?" I almost shrieked.

"Paradise would hold for me more joys if the curse of mine error did not crush thy sister. And it may be that she will live, for she is young and has been but three years a princess; but I know not what evils the withdrawing of my influence will work. If she survives, lavish on her the devotion of thy life."

"O queen," I cried in a hollow voice, "I have been the serpent in thine Eden."

"Say not so, for thou hast led me from a material world to the land where dwell the immortal gods."

Diana ceased speaking. That passion which she blessed took possession of her and she threw herself in my embrace.

“Let me feel but one, the sweetest of all the passions—a mortal’s love,” she said. “There, fare thee well.”

The beautiful head lay still upon my breast. For a long time I stood motionless, bewildered, dazed, and then I raised her up. Heaven blot from my memory the sound of my own shriek. The queen’s spirit had fled, and her once heavenly face was shrunken and made hideous by the wrinkles of three thousand years. Hastily I laid her down amid the splendors of her treasure house, and ran wildly up the steps, not even stopping to take one precious gem.

When I reached the hall I witnessed another sight awful and hideous; there, in their stately robes, lay the shrunken forms of the queen’s household, all save Thalia and my sister. I ran out of the palace to seek them. I reeled as I went, and my brain burned with anxiety for Vesta.

Under a tree I found them, Thalia lying

upon the ground weak and helpless, but smiling upon me as I approached.

“Nay, look not aghast at my wrinkles, Prince Angelo, for they are but the honorable marks of an old age,” she said.

“O Thalia, O my sister ; the queen is dead and her children, save only thou.”

“We did judge as much,” answered Thalia, for see, her departure has left me nothing but the hideousness of five hundred years. But peace, my prince, she has but changed her abode to the home of the infinite God who dwells beyond the stars. Often has the queen taught us of that Being who rules the universe.”

One of the inhabitants passed near by, and I commanded him to bear the sad news to the village. He stared at me for a moment as though to determine if I had not gone mad ; then he caught sight of Thalia and ran swiftly away shrieking like some demon. He was not long gone when we heard a rumbling sound in the direction of the village, and we saw the in-

habitants running madly towards us, while the air was filled with the fearful warning, "Woe to the destroyer of the queen! woe! woe!" I grew faint with fear as the words died away and a sound more terrible and distinct came to my ears, "Death to the serpent; destruction to the traitor Angelo."

"Save thyself," cried Thalia; "the populace are furious and will do thee harm. Hasten, O, prince, ere it be too late. Farewell, my Vesta, my spirit takes its flight. Farewell, Angelo, farewell."

Nearer came the seething populace; louder were the shrieks of the maddened mob as they rushed toward us. I looked toward Vesta—she had fainted. I caught her in my arms and rushed away, whither I knew not, anywhere, that I might escape the fury of the people. In my agony I thought of my boat and ran towards it, and placing my precious burden on one of the seats, I cut the rope which held it fast, sprang in, and hoisted the sail. A fresh

breeze was blowing and we were carried swiftly out to sea. We were safe at last. The ocean, which I had before thought so cruel, saved me from the vengeance of the multitude.

Vesta opened her eyes and looked wonderingly about.

"It was a dream," she cried, joyously ; "tell me it was but a dream, my brother. I did think the queen and my sisters were no more, and that the people were crying for thy blood, and I awake to find myself sailing with thee."

I turned my head that she might not see my emotion.

"Thou dost not answer," she cried, coming up to me. "Tell me that I have dreamed."

"My sister," I began sadly, but the sentence was never completed, for at that moment a terrible shock almost capsized our boat, and looking toward the island, now a mere speck on the horizon, we saw it tremble a moment and then sink out of sight forever.

I remembered Mullane and his lamp, and the gaseous cavern where rolled the dark river. Poor Mullane ! I trust in that one vivid flash he saw his beautiful love by whose side he will sleep forever beneath the ruins of a strange kingdom.

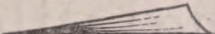
As Vesta beheld the destruction of her home, she nestled close to my breast as if for protection, and my heart leapt with the joy of a great love.


"O, Vesta," I cried ; no longer my sister, but my love ; here, while the waves murmur perhaps our funeral dirge, may I call thee mine ? "

And Vesta answered, as she nestled closer :

"Whether we find a grave beneath the waves or ride safely to some harbor of thine own land, I am thine forever. ' Whither thou goest, I will go ; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge ; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.' "

THE END.

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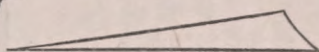
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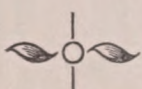
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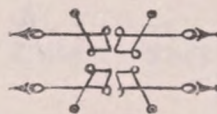
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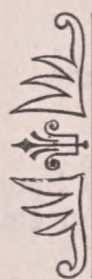


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
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